



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, November 26, 2024

Day 73

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Deputy Government House Leader
Arcand-Paul, Brooks, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA,
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Boitchenko, Andrew, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy Assistant Whip
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
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Dyck, Nolan B., Grande Prairie (UC)
Eggen, Hon. David, ECA, Edmonton-North West (NDP)
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Deputy Premier
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Eremenko, Janet, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
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Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., ECA, Calgary-Mountain View (NDP),
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(UC)
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Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
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Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),
Deputy Government Whip
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Lethbridge-West

Party standings:

United Conservative: 49

New Democrat: 37

Vacant: 1

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Eremenko
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Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Getson

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Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms Pitt

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Bouchard
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Deol
Dyck
Hayter
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Sigurdson, L.
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Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Yao

Deputy Chair: Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk

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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Sabir

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Armstrong-Homeniuk
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de Jonge
Ellingson
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McDougall
Renaud
Schmidt

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Rowswell

Deputy Chair: Ms Sweet

Al-Guneid
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Calahoo Stonehouse
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McDougall
Sinclair

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 26, 2024

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert has a school group to introduce.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you 98 students from Richard S. Fowler school in St. Albert. I would ask all the grade 9 students and their teacher Michael Molzan to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education has an introduction.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to all members of the Assembly student leaders from the Alberta Students Executive Council. I want to thank them for their advocacy on behalf of Alberta students, and I invite them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Member Boparai: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Harbhej Singh Sidhu, a blogger from Punjab who is visiting us in the Alberta Legislature today. He has been creating content focusing on heritage and history in the Punjabi language. I ask Harbhej to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly my guests from the Chiropractic Association of Alberta. Their work not only benefits individuals but also reduces the strain on our health care system by offering effective preventative care. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly what might be one of Alberta's greatest chiropractors and also the chair of the Chiropractic Association of Alberta, a wonderful lady from Airdrie, Dr. Jacqueline Boyd. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you Mr. Veer Divinder Chahal. He's a renowned Punjabi singer who's performed globally in a hundred countries, based in Calgary since 2018. He enriches the community through music. I ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you and to all members of the Assembly Dr. Mark Redmond, D'Arcy Hilgartner, and Pam Cholak. Dr. Redmond is the CEO with Results Driven Agriculture Research, or RDAR, and D'Arcy is the vice-chair of RDAR's board. Thank you, Pam, for organizing this visit today. I ask you to rise and please receive the warm welcome of this Chamber.

Members' Statements

Support for Postsecondary Students

Mr. Eggen: Alberta students are struggling. I've toured the province this fall, meeting with campus groups such as ASEC, who we have here today, and student leaders, and I continue to hear troubling information about students struggling with some of the highest tuition fees in the country, massive increases to uses of food banks, and desperation in finding affordable housing. This UCP government has made monumental cuts to Advanced Education, and now we're seeing the results. Alberta has one of the highest tuition rates of any province across Canada, and students demonstrate concerning levels of poverty, including the above-noted average for struggling to pay rent, skipping class, and having to use the food banks.

We also know that many students are struggling to find work to cover the cost of living during studies and over the summers, when they hope to save money for tuition. Rent, groceries, insurance, utilities, tuition: the list of cost-of-living pressures goes on and on, yet this government does nothing. Our college, university, and polytechnic students are our future of this province. We will rely on these same people to lead our workforce, teach in our schools, staff our hospitals, and build our infrastructure, yet the UCP is making it harder and harder for them to access an education and to prepare for the future. It is essential that we recognize that we are making education inaccessible for so many others and jeopardizing our future at the same time.

We simply must be smarter, Mr. Speaker. Postsecondary is one of the best investments that we can make to secure our future, and the repeated and disastrous cuts this government is making puts this all at risk. It is urgent that we support students struggling now, invest in spaces for institutions for the future, and that this government takes its head out of the sand to address the cost-of-living crisis and stop picking unnecessary fights that no one asked for. Students deserve our support.

Youth Treatment and Recovery Centres

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, just last week the NDP was quoted in the context of children and youth saying: what we need to see with this government is more access to harm reduction. Ugh. To translate, harm reduction has become the euphemistic term for policies like unsafe supply, decriminalization, and the distribution of drug paraphernalia to those suffering from addiction. Harm reduction is the policy framework that drove Canada to establish more drug consumption sites than the rest of the world combined. We see this in British Columbia, led by an NDP government, where vending machines are placed in communities for anyone to access free crack

pipes, needles, meth pipes, and so much more; no cost, no questions asked. The NDP solution to the addiction crisis: facilitate, palliate, and proliferate, now producing the very same harm caused by the addiction itself.

Mr. Speaker, their response is no different when it comes to our children and youth, as it was proven last week. What we need are solutions for treatment and recovery that do not condemn our children to a lifetime of addiction. We need opportunities for our kids to heal and take back their lives from this deadly disease. That's why our government is taking steps to increase youth treatment capacity, more than doubling what currently exists with the newly announced northern Alberta youth recovery centre. This \$23 million investment will add another 105 youth treatment beds into our system. No parent should be left powerless in helping their kids overcome the deadly disease of addiction. Unlike the NDP solution of pills and pipes, our government is offering a compassionate way out of addiction. I am proud to have it right here in Alberta.

We have a moral decision to make when it comes to our youth, and, Mr. Speaker, our side of the House chooses recovery. Thank you.

Vecova Aquatics, Health, and Fitness Centre

Dr. Metz: If you're a senior with arthritis, you know how important Vecova's warm pool is to maintain your mobility and soothe your pain. If you're a parent of a child with disabilities, you know how important Vecova's physiotherapy programs are. If you're a new parent, you know how important Vecova's parent and baby classes are for reconnecting you with your community during a very stressful time. While Vecova focuses on supporting people with disabilities, it's also an important recreation facility for all in the community. My children participated in the recreation programs and the swimming lessons at Vecova. My mother took classes to help her avoid falls. My neighbours use supports for people with dementia, including supports for caregivers.

Unfortunately, the building will close by June 2025. It cannot make it through another summer. The building closure is an incredible loss for countless people, including those who use the facility and those who will now lose their jobs. There will be no other truly accessible warm-water pool in all of Calgary. The indifference to seniors and those recovering from illness and injury, whose ability to maintain or regain their mobility is dependent on the warm water and the rehabilitation programs: this should bring shame to the government. We can put billions into an arena but not provide people with basic necessities to maintain and improve their lives.

I urge this government to find a way to keep Vecova's facilities open so we can continue to support constituents. Vecova urgently needs our help.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Chiropractic Care

Mr. Dyck: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you so very much. When I was in my early teens, myself and a few friends would wake up, pile into my dad's work vehicle, and we would head to the ski hill. My friends and I spent a lot of time on the slopes. As young men we loved cruising the tree runs as fast as we possibly could, but this posed some risks. When there are trees, there are stumps, and one day I was cruising and I hit a pack of these stumps, wiped out, and ended up landing on one. This caused some compressed discs and a lot of back and hip pain for several years. But through this journey I was able to get some significant help from my local chiropractor in Grande Prairie, Dr. Jen, and a chiropractor here in Edmonton, Dr. Sharp. Through significant work I'm able to walk pain free, so thank you so very much.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, chiropractors play a significant role here in Alberta and are the second most consulted practitioners for arthritis and chronic back pain across the province, following physicians. In Alberta between April 2022 and March 2023 there were just over 300,000 lower back pain patients, who had just over 915,000 physician visits at a cost of just over \$93 million to the health system.

From 2011 to 2018 patients' claims relating to lower back pain skyrocketed from \$1.8 million to \$4.5 million while prescriptions increased from \$2.5 million to \$6.4 million. Mr. Speaker, this is a lot of people suffering from lower back pain, but it also shows the significant financial burden it places on Alberta's health care system. Despite the growing demand, approximately 95 per cent of surgical referrals from primary care for lower back pain do not require surgery but could be helped through chiropractic care, which could help in removing people from waiting lists for surgical evaluations and removing delay in effective therapies.

While I'm just a single person, Mr. Speaker, chiropractors have helped me, and I'm very thankful for them. Here in Alberta an entire team of health care professionals are helpful for Albertans to choose from, and I'm very thankful for their work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Darrel Bruno

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: With a heavy heart I speak today to honour the work and dedication of Samson Cree member staff sergeant Darrel Bruno. He dedicated over 25 years of his life to the RCMP.

Throughout his distinguished career Staff Sergeant Bruno broke down barriers and challenged the status quo. He was brave and before his time. In the '90s he took the RCMP to court, fighting for the rights of Indigenous peoples, ensuring that pretendians were not elevating their roles within the force. The court decision favoured him, and the RCMP now have a policy that ensures First Nations and Métis must prove their identity when claiming Indigeneity.

Staff Sergeant Bruno also fought for the Nehiyaw culture to be accepted as part of the official uniform. After the court decision he was the very first in our province to proudly wear his braids, paving the way for officers to be able to do the same.

Staff Sergeant Bruno's commitment to community-based policing transformed the way the RCMP approached public safety. He worked tirelessly to empower communities. He would give lectures and many speeches declaring: we must take back our communities. His model was rooted in crime prevention and now has been shared around the world. Staff Sergeant Bruno was a fierce and relentless advocate for the protection of women, and he supported and advocated for the creation of Indigenous-led women's shelters. He was the founder of cadets on many nations across our province, serving thousands of Indigenous youth.

His legacy extends far beyond his own community, inspiring a new generation of leaders and change-makers. As his partner, Constable Perry Cardinal, so eloquently put it: "I would not have been able to do or have done what I did without him; he taught me how to be that guy, the good guy. His moccasins are going to be tough to fill."

Hay-hay.

Julien Arnold

Member Ceci: "Cancel show! Wobbly pops!" Those are the prophetic, light-hearted comments Julien Arnold would use to break the ice when things fell apart on set. A truly remarkable actor and cherished member of the Edmonton theatre community, Julien was more than a

performer. He was a beacon of joy, warmth, and artistry who lit up every stage he graced.

From the intimate comedies of Teatro la Quindicina to the grand productions of Shakespeare in the park, Julien's talents knew no bounds. He was as adept at breaking our hearts with his depth of dramatic roles as he was at bringing laughter with his impeccable comic timing. His versatility was extraordinary. Whether portraying the jubilant Mr. Fezziwig, the lovable Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or the soulful Bob Cratchit in *A Christmas Carol*, he gave every performance his all. A proud graduate of the University of Alberta's theatre school he began his journey as a young actor, brimming with talent and promise. He cofounded the Freewill Shakespeare Festival, giving Edmonton summers a rich tradition of Shakespeare under the stars. Later he created the Atlas Theatre Collective and returned to his alma mater to pursue a master's degree in directing, further enriching the artistic fabric of our community.

In his life Julien embodied the spirit of the theatre: ever committed, endlessly creative, and profoundly human. His loss leaves a void in our hearts, but his legacy will live on in the stories he told, the lives he touched, and the magic he brought to the stage.

Rest in peace, dear Julien. You will forever float in our memories at peace and so full of light of some wobbly pops.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Government Motion 51 I wish to advise the Assembly that there will be no evening sitting tonight.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings today? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table more of the countless e-mails that my colleagues and I have received denouncing the antitrans bills. These are from three folks all across the province: Jeff, Lindsay, and Sara. I urge those UCP members to start reading their e-mails and kill the egregious antitrans bills.

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

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Further to the debate that took place in the Chamber yesterday, I would like to table the requisite number of copies of what Naheed Nenshi's former students said he's really like.

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of the Rural Municipalities of Alberta report entitled Seeking Balance: Voting Inequalities in Alberta's Growth Management Boards, from February 2023.

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

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the five requisite copies of the Canadian inflation rates chart that I referenced yesterday in speaking to MR 10.

Member Batten: I rise to table the OCYA annual report, specifically appendix B, to remind the minister and this room that, of course, they need to refresh their memories. Since 2019 . . .

The Speaker: My apologies. I hesitate to interrupt; however, that report has been tabled in this session. There's no requirement to retable it.

Are there other tablings?

Mrs. Petrovic: I rise to table the five requisite copies of the press release on the results on the nonbinding vote, with 72 per cent in favour of the Grassy Mountain coal mine from Crowsnest Pass.

The Speaker: For the sake of clarity you are unable to table a document which has already been previously tabled. It's not a discretionary measure that the Speaker may take.

Mr. Rowswell: I'd like to table a Global News report titled Crowsnest Pass Residents Vote Overwhelmingly for New . . . Coal Mine. This is by the people that actually live and are most impacted by it.

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a copy of a report by the Canadian Psychological Association titled Promotion of Gender Diversity and Expression and Prevention of Gender-related Hate and Harm. It has very clearly outlined that things that are now being promoted by this government will cause harm to folks in that community.

The Speaker: Are there others? The minister of agriculture has a tabling.

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and table the requisite five copies of each of several annual reports for the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, including 2023-24 annual report of the Agricultural Finances Services Corporation, the 2023-24 annual report of Livestock Identification Services, the 2023-24 annual report of the Farmers' Advocate, and the 2023-24 annual report of the Alberta Agricultural Products Marketing Council.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I do have a tabling, the required number of copies of the Members' Services Committee MSC Order 04/24, that was approved by the Members' Services Committee this morning.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Affordability Measures

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, thanks to the UCP, Alberta has the highest utility costs in the country and the highest auto insurance costs, that the UCP are letting go up another 15 and a half per cent over the next two years. Alberta has the largest inflation, 50 per cent higher than the national average, and thanks to the UCP, Alberta has the highest unemployment west of the Maritimes. Under the UCP Alberta has the lowest minimum wage in Canada. With all of that, why did the UCP government MLAs vote to give themselves an extra \$270 a month for living allowance, a retroactive 14 per cent bump while average Albertans struggle?

Speaker's Ruling

Questions about Committee Proceedings

The Speaker: I'm sure that the hon. Official Opposition House Leader will be very familiar with *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* page 513, that speaks about proceedings at committee. Speakers have

asked the member to rephrase the question such that it might be about government business or have ruled such questions out of order. The hon. the Official Opposition House Leader has a couple of moments to rephrase her question or we'll move on.

Affordability Measures (continued)

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What is the government's policy on doing nothing for Albertans while doing things for themselves?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government is doing everything we can to provide support to those who most need it by lowering costs on all the things that are creating pressure in households. One of the biggest areas that we've provided support is our child care program, which subsidizes families to the tune of about \$700 per child in each household. We've brought down electricity rates with the incredible work being done by our Affordability and Utilities minister. They've come down 39 per cent from the same time last year. We've also brought through proposals to change auto insurance to reduce the fees by \$400 a month.

Ms Gray: Let me be clear. We all know that under the UCP rent is up, and we learned in committee they're very aware of it. For the average Albertan it's been a struggle to pay some of the fastest rising housing costs in the country. We've been pointing that out for years in this Chamber, and the government has done nothing to control costs for renters who don't make MLA salaries. No one asked for MLAs to get a higher cost-of-living allowance, except maybe the UCP caucus members. NDP members oppose this additional hit to taxpayers. Why when so many people are struggling is it government policy to think only of themselves?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The approach that we have taken is to increase the amount of supply. When you have a lot of people moving into Alberta – and we've seen 450,000 people move here in the last three years – it does put pressure on the housing stock. So we've been working with developers to be able to increase not only the number of single-family homes but also the number of purpose-built rentals. And it's working, especially in Edmonton, Calgary, and Lethbridge as well as in our other mid-size communities. We have also increased the amount of rental supplement to help those most in need.

Ms Gray: Rent supplements for MLAs; not enough for Albertans. The Premier has just announced higher auto insurance for Albertans on top of the highest inflation in the country and she refuses to budge on the minimum wage. So many Albertans are working two or three jobs to make ends meet, from Lethbridge to High Level, and it's frankly appalling that UCP members would think that MLAs, of all people, deserve a cost-of-living increase. Why would the Premier not make it government policy to stop this outrageous move? And will she do the right thing: tell her members to undo this unnecessary pay hike that they gave themselves at committee this morning?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, there were a lot of things in there to respond to, so let me respond to the issue of minimum wage. The members opposite know that the vast majority of those who are receiving minimum wage are those who are under the age of 24. Most of them as well living with their parents; 93 per cent of them

have a single job. The minimum wage is the entry point into the job market. One of the things we remain concerned about is the 14 per cent student and young person unemployment rate that we see. What we are hoping to see is that more of those jobs will become available to that young workforce so that they can get their first foot in the door.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Gray: Sixty-five per cent of minimum wage earners are not students, possibly because they are unemployed.

Trade with the United States

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the incoming U.S. President proposed a 25 per cent tariff on all Canadian imports, and it would devastate our economy. Alberta sells the United States a lot more than just oil products through pipelines. Billions of goods are at risk of a 25 per cent tax from President-elect Trump. Economist Trevor Tombe estimates these tariffs will hurt the Canadian GDP by roughly \$2,000 per person and potentially lead to a recession. Will the Premier condemn the new President's proposed 25 per cent tariff on Alberta products?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is right. A 25 per cent tariff across the board would be devastating not only to Alberta but to our partners in Confederation and our fellow Premiers. We are going to be having a meeting with the Prime Minister tomorrow and all of the Premiers, and we will express our concern to him about the ways in which we believe – the pressure points he needs to address in order for us to be able to get back to a productive relationship with the United States. I believe the new administration has been very clear about what it is they want. They want us to meet our 2 per cent NATO commitment, and they want to stop the leaky border.

Ms Gray: In communities like Lethbridge agriculture and agrifood industries are the lifeblood of the city. Alberta sells billions of dollars' worth of agricultural products from grains to pulses, beef to oilseed, and value-added agrifood products. Our farmers, ranchers, and food manufacturers are highly integrated to the U.S. market, but all of that is at extreme risk from the proposed 25 per cent tariff. I'm glad to hear that the Premier is meeting with other Premiers and with the Prime Minister. How will Alberta contribute to combatting this 25 per cent tariff that could devastate our economy in less than two months?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It would have been nice for the members opposite to lobby their federal leader so that they didn't support the federal government in some of the harmful policies that we have seen that have now created the pressure with our American counterparts: the revolving door in our jails, the increase in the amount of fentanyl trade, the number of people coming into Canada who are now sneaking across the border into the United States. These are the things we need to address, and I would hope that the members opposite would lobby their federal leader in Ottawa to stand with us in addressing those concerns.

Ms Gray: The incoming U.S. administration's 25 per cent tariffs will deal a huge blow to what have been diverse industries across our province. From clean tech to life sciences, pharmaceuticals to aerospace, and more, our trade-dependent industries could face job

losses, shutdowns, and huge loss of investment if this tariff is brought in. It's no laughing matter, and it's not the time to pass the buck. The Premier is the one who's going to be in the room with other Premiers and the Prime Minister. Instead of talking about what the Official Opposition should do, what will Alberta's Premier do? What should Alberta be doing to protect our economy?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, the one product that we have that we know the Americans want is energy. The members opposite and their leader, the NDP in Ottawa, have been working with the Liberal counterparts to do everything they can to punish our industry, keep it in the ground, reduce production, and impact affordability through the carbon tax. They should stand with us in saying, "Take off the punitive taxes on our energy industry so we can approach the Americans saying, 'Look. We want to provide you a secure supply of energy to address your security needs and your affordability needs.'" That's the path forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has question 3.

Affordability Measures (continued)

Ms Pancholi: Since 2019 Alberta renters have faced unprecedented rent increases; over 50 per cent in Lethbridge and similar increases in Calgary and Edmonton. Yet the UCP has consistently rejected rent relief measures including the NDP's Bill 205, which would have capped rent increases. Now UCP MLAs have approved a 14 per cent increase to MLA rental allowances including a retroactive little Christmas bonus of \$2,000. This is the height of hypocrisy. How can the government policy be to defend their MLAs for providing rent relief to themselves but not to Albertans?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the NDP brought a bill to this Chamber and pushed policies that would bring in rent control, which would have shut down the construction industry in our province, which would have made more people homeless. This side of the House focused on increasing supply and has increased it by 34 per cent this year. In places like Lethbridge, which the hon. member just mentioned, it's up by 200 per cent, housing starts, significantly. We're seeing this plan work with Calgary's rent going down by 4.7 per cent, the only place in the country that has seen rent go down like that because we rejected the NDP's ridiculous plan of blocking rent.

Ms Pancholi: Rent control for UCP MLAs but not for Albertans.

Here's a list of the things the UCP won't tie to the cost of living: AISH, seniors' benefits, minimum wage, personal income tax exemptions. And here's a list of benefits they think should be tied to the cost of living: rental allowances for MLAs; in other words, benefits that only benefit themselves. This government has no problem prioritizing themselves while most Albertans are one paycheque away from losing their homes. Is it government policy that the Alberta advantage only applies to the UCP?

2:00

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, this government did tie AISH to inflation. We increased AISH last year by about 4.7 per cent. We are on track to increase it next year by 2 per cent. The former government, the NDP government, never indexed AISH once inside their budget. I'm happy to report to you that Alberta will pay \$1,901 a month to AISH recipients next year, in the next budget, the most in the country, because this government takes it seriously. We promised

Albertans that we would take it seriously, and we're going to continue to do it. We're not going to go down the road that the NDP did.

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, that minister must be dizzy from all that spin.

For those keeping track, in the same week that the UCP announced that Albertans who are already paying the most for car insurance in the country will pay 15 per cent more for that same insurance, UCP MLAs then announced they'd be giving themselves 14 per cent more for their own rent. Is it government policy to be so quick to help their own MLAs to pay rent while doing nothing for Albertans who can't pay theirs?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, coming from the party that, when they were in government, told Albertans who were struggling with things like the carbon tax to take the bus, that's pretty rich. This side of the aisle is focused on making things better for Albertans. When it comes to things like rent and housing, we are accomplishing that from hard work with our industry and rejecting socialist policies that we see from the other side that would have chased away development, that would have chased away construction. I'm proud to be part of a province that has got the highest construction rates anywhere in this country, and we're not going to stop, despite what the NDP says.

Government Policies

Member Irwin: I've heard from countless Albertans being crushed by skyrocketing car insurance rates, and now, thanks to the UCP, they're going to be paying even more. Charlie is a student who works minimum wage. She's already paying \$250 a month in premiums and is stressed about how much more they'll go up. Ashley moved to Alberta last year, and she's paying more than triple what she paid in another province. Aaron drives a 22-year-old car, has a spotless driving record, and his insurance just went up \$100. Rebecca's car insurance is about to be the same as her car payment, completely unmanageable. To the Premier. These are just a few of the many real Albertans suffering under your reckless plan. What do you have to say to them?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud to stand beside the Minister of Finance. He and his team took an extreme approach to make sure they talked to everybody within the entire stakeholder group to find the best solution available to Alberta. That's why they brought forward a care-first system that will provide better, faster, more affordable insurance to all Albertans, no matter where they live. He's done an incredible amount of work. He is leading us in the only path available to us before we go to a public system, which also costs taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars across this country. We're doing the best for Albertans.

Member Irwin: It's extreme, all right.

It's not just car insurance that the UCP are getting wrong. We continue to hear from folks all over Alberta alarmed at the UCP's meddling in their pensions. They were shocked to see the UCP fire yet another board, this time AIMCo, a move that, according to the *New York Times*, "[defies] a long-held principle that [pension] funds should be free of political interference." Here we are again making international headlines for all the wrong reasons. My constituents don't want the UCP or their partisan pals anywhere near their pensions. Minister, the message from Albertans is clear. Hands off our CPP.

Mr. Neudorf: Mr. Speaker, that's why, again, the Minister of Finance has done a terrific job looking all across the country to find former Prime Minister Stephen Harper, one of the most respected politicians and one of the most incredible resumés available, to do this work. He is graciously doing it pro bono. He is not charging anything to the people of Alberta. He is going to make sure that, at the request of the pension holders, he brings order back, lowers costs, and brings better results. We look forward to working with him. We're proud to have him.

Member Irwin: Edmonton continues to lead the country in rental increases. That's right. Rents are rising faster here than in any other major Canadian city, and along with these rapid rent increases come extremely low vacancy rates, creating a perfect storm for renters. We learned today that out-of-town UCP MLAs are also feeling the pinch of high rents in Edmonton, so they've boosted their own living allowances by a whopping \$270 a month. Why is the UCP giving themselves rent relief while doing absolutely nothing to help Albertans struggling to make ends meet?

The Speaker: The . . .

Member Irwin: Make it make sense.

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services.

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government is investing in the housing crisis significantly more than any other government in the country. The hon. member mentioned Edmonton. We've seen Edmonton vacancy rates double last month as a result of the good policy that is taking place on this side of the aisle. We've also increased our investments in things like rent supplements to a quarter billion dollars, our investment in affordable capital to \$9 billion. We will continue to do that. Unfortunately, under the NDP they never even built over a thousand affordable houses in the four years that they were in government. As I've told you before, I built more than that just this month alone.

Automobile Insurance Reform

Mr. Ellingson: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are tired of being hammered with the rising costs of everything: food, housing, utilities, and more. There's no question that auto insurance is on that list, with Alberta having some of the highest premiums in Canada. Instead of listening to Albertans' pleas and lowering costs, this government is increasing the rates for good drivers by 15 per cent over the next two years. When Albertans are already stretched so thin, why is this government forcing them to pay even more?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're not forcing people to pay more. What we are doing is providing them options and choice. That's what they've asked for. They've also asked for us to keep our private market whole, so we are not allowing the cap to go up that much. We are keeping the cap in place, raising it a little bit for viability, not to make them whole. We are trying to put all the pieces together to provide a care-first model, which will provide better, faster, and more affordable auto insurance to all Albertans. We're doing it in under two years. If we went to a public model, which is what the opposition has been asking for, it could take five years and cost billions of dollars.

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

Mr. Ellingson: Yeah. Given that 15 per cent might not be much to that minister but it is a lot to ordinary Albertans, that this government scheme results in an increase of more than \$800, double the hoped-for future discount for a 30-year-old male driver in Red Deer, and that the same constituents in Calgary-Foothills would be paying even more and that the recent StatsCan survey showed that over half of Albertans, more than any other province, are struggling to meet day-to-day expenses, why is this government, rather than helping Albertans, forcing them to squeeze their budgets even further?

Mr. Neudorf: Mr. Speaker, we are trying to make sure that we have a market to come back to. That's why we are working with all of our stakeholders in this field to make sure they have options and choices moving ahead. Unlike the NDP, where they force businesses out of business and pass that cost onto the taxpayers, hiding costs for all Albertans and subsidizing it, we are not. We are being transparent in our offers. We are making sure we work with stakeholders. We are keeping costs reasonable and providing a path for a better future for Albertans. We're doing the work the NDP failed to do.

Mr. Ellingson: Given that those options are resulting in Albertans paying more, that those Albertans would be paying hundreds of dollars more for auto insurance each year and that the only guardrail in place for auto insurance is a federal cap of 6 per cent profit, given that the proposed legislation has no provisions in place to guarantee future decreases in premiums and that a report on the government's own website stated that going down the public insurance route could save drivers more than \$700 a year, why is this government not even considering the public option and is instead more concerned with lining the pockets of insurance companies?

Mr. Neudorf: In fact, Mr. Speaker, I remember being in this House and listening to the Minister of Finance say that public insurance was an option. We did consider it, and the results came back; \$3 billion and over five years to get results, not to mention thousands upon thousands of private insurance jobs lost. We are not doing that. We are working with industry. We are making the best path forward for a care-first model, modelling it after what they've done in Manitoba but with more generous provisions at a lower cost. We look forward to our industry responding to the challenge and serving Albertans first.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville has a question to ask.

Gender-based Violence Prevention

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Gender-based violence is something that touches every community in all corners of the province. It is a terrible form of violence that has impacted too many Albertans, and it must come to a stop. This terrible behaviour is on our minds as we approach the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women on December 6. To the Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women: Minister, can you please provide Albertans with an update on the 10-year action plan to end gender-based violence?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women.

2:10

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is correct. Gender-based violence is something that affects too many Albertans, and Alberta's government is working on an action plan to end this terrible form of violence. To date our government has met with hundreds of

nonprofits, community leaders, survivors, shelters, sexual assault centres, and more to help create this action plan. We hope to be able to release the action plan in the new year. We're doing our due diligence to ensure that this made-in-Alberta action plan supports survivors, engages men and boys, addresses any gaps in current programs and addresses root causes, and works to break the cycle of violence.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and Minister. Given that this government is taking a holistic approach to creating this made-in-Alberta action plan and given that Alberta's government has consulted meaningfully with hundreds of community leaders, municipalities, Indigenous groups, and survivors to create a well-rounded action plan, can the same minister please provide an update on the investments made into services and programs by this government to help prevent and end gender-based violence?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just some of the investments this government has made into ending and preventing gender-based violence are \$10 million for women's shelters, \$16.8 million for sexual assault centres, \$4 million for Indigenous-led projects, \$3.8 million for sexual assault centres to address wait-lists, \$400,000 for the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services, \$1 million for the rural sexual assault program, \$625,000 for postsecondary institutions, \$500,000 for a public awareness campaign, \$9.7 million for elder abuse, and \$2 million into grants for programs that address root causes of gender-based violence.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and Minister. Given that we've seen millions invested by this government into services and programs that help prevent and end gender-based violence – additionally, this government is taking action to address this terrible form of violence – and given that the government successfully negotiated a bilateral funding agreement with the federal government to the tune of \$54 million, can the same minister please tell Albertans how this bilateral agreement with the federal government is being used to prevent gender-based violence and support survivors?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In addition to the \$54 million that the member references and the \$100 million that the government of Alberta invests annually, I'd like to point out that when the member opposite talked the other day about this government diverting time and resources away from this crisis, nothing could be further from the truth and the millions of dollars of examples I just listed. When the member opposite talks about needing real accountability for perpetrators, I could not agree with her more, and I would really look forward to hearing how she's advocated to the federal government to fix our broken justice system.

Bills 33 and 34

Mr. Sabir: Alberta's Information and Privacy Commissioner wrote to the minister of service Alberta and the Minister of Technology and Innovation expressing deep concerns over bills 33 and 34. The commissioner warns that Bill 34 "may significantly degrade the openness of Government of Alberta departments." Albertans have the right to know what their government is doing, and they deserve an open, honest, and transparent government. Minister,

why are you pushing a bill that will make this government less open and less transparent?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

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

A point of order is noted at 2:13.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yeah. The OIPC is doing her job as the OIPC, and she wrote us a letter and gave us some feedback, which is certainly her job. Listen, we're committed to continuing to engage with her as we build out the regulations. Here's what I can tell you. Our OIPC legislation reflects jurisdictions across the country. There's literally no light between us about providing access to our citizens with government documents. That's all that we're doing.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the commissioner has warned that Bill 34 "takes access rights a step back" and she urged that it be reconsidered, given that FOIP is a tool that allows the public to see what the government is doing and hold them accountable, given that without adequate access to information laws, Albertans would have been left in the dark about things like the sky palace scandal, is the minister worried something might come out? If not, why is this government taking Albertans' access rights backwards with Bill 34?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, FOIP is about providing Albertans with access to government documents. That's what this legislation does. It modernizes it because it's antiquated. It's outdated, so we're simply modernizing it. We're providing some clarity, and at the end of the day we will make sure that Albertans have world-class access to government documents. That's what this is about. In addition, we're going to reflect the rest of the jurisdictions in the country when it comes to providing access to information.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the commissioner has been performing an investigation into the government's handling of freedom of information requests and given that the investigation is expected to be concluded by the end of this year and given that ensuring that Albertans' privacy is protected and that their access to information is critical, will the minister commit to listening to the commissioner, accepting her recommendations on both bills and stop these bills before it's too late?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you what I will do. I'll commit to playing a little game I like to call walk down memory lane. You see, in 2017 a Justice e-mail was leaked that showed that the then NDP government was asking to find out the names of the individuals and the groups that were putting in FOIP requests. Now, that sounds like surveillance to me. I'm not a lawyer. I don't know if it was a crime, I don't know if it's just unethical, but I know that it was wrong. We're going to put some legislation in to make sure that doesn't happen again. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora is next.

Health Care Accessibility

Ms Hoffman: Yesterday we asked the Premier to do anything to help the nearly 1 million Albertans who don't have a family doctor. The Premier blamed doctors. She said that each doctor should have 1,500 patients. But our own government policy says that family doctors with more than 1,000 patients are over-rostered. More patients would mean even longer waits for those who are lucky enough to even have a doctor, who are already waiting weeks or even months. When the president of

the Alberta Medical Association can't get a family doctor, there's a medical crisis. So will the Premier take some responsibility today, or is she going to keep blaming overworked doctors?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health has risen.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:16.
The Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll have the member opposite know that I've been in constant contact with the AMA president, the new president, and she knows that we're working really, really hard to make sure that we have that new primary care compensation model up and running for April 1 of next year. We are working together. She's been very complimentary of the work that we have done. We will continue to do that work because we know that every Albertan deserves a primary care provider. It's why we've instituted the nurse practitioner program, the pharmacy position-led clinics, et cetera.

Ms Hoffman: Given that blaming doctors for the UCP crisis in health care is tone deaf and will certainly do nothing to help the morale of already overworked doctors, given that the minister should know that doctors with more than 1,000 patients tied to them are considered overpanelled and they've been given a stipend by the current government because this means that they're either working overtime or have less time for each patient or they're making patients wait weeks or months, to the minister. The Premier said 1,500. Does the Minister of Health think family doctors should have 1,500 patients? What's the right number, Minister?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we are working really hard to make sure that we have the right number of physicians, particularly family physicians and rural generalists, in the province. The member opposite doesn't seem to recognize the fact that when I first took office, there were roughly 10,600 physicians in the province; we now have over 12,100 physicians, of which many are family physicians that are coming to Alberta because they know that they have a great work environment in Alberta, the lowest taxes, and the ability to come onto the new programs.

Ms Hoffman: Given that doctors aren't saying that they have a great work environment, that they're fed up with this government and many of them are leaving the province, and given that the NDP – when we were in government you could get a family doctor in every major municipality, you could get a nurse. In fact, we rarely had to use contracted nursing services. In the last year I was Health minister, we spent less than \$500,000 on nursing agency coverage, but under the UCP that's risen to more than \$155 million. So why won't the minister sign a contract with public nurses to ensure stability instead of increasing the budget for private, for-profit nursing contracts?

Member LaGrange: Well, it's obvious that the member opposite when she was Minister of Health didn't know how things work. When you have negotiations, you negotiate. That is a process that has to be gone through, and I'm not going to speculate on that process at this point in time.

The work that we're doing with the family physicians, that actually is in addition to a negotiated contract that we negotiated just two years ago. Knowing that we have a problem with family medicine, we are

in fact negotiating a new primary care compensation model. I'm looking forward to sharing that very soon.

2:20 **Agriprocessing Investment Tax Credit**

Mrs. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, milk is crucial to the everyday life of many Canadians. It's in breakfast cereal, mac and cheese at dinner, and that special homemade cheesecake. Dairy Innovation West is a new collaborative project showcasing the western provinces' commitment to innovation and sustainability. This state-of-the-art milk concentration plant in Blackfalds transforms unprocessed milk into a concentrated form that's more efficient for transport and further processing. Can the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation tell the Assembly how our government is attracting investment in agrifood processing projects like this new facility?

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

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Our government's agriprocessing investment tax credit program is making Alberta a hot spot for major investments in value-added agricultural manufacturing. When corporations invest at least \$10 million to build or expand a value-added agricultural processing facility here in Alberta, they can receive a 12 per cent nonrefundable tax credit. I'm pleased to say that Dairy Innovation West qualified for the program by investing \$73.7 million to construct a high-tech milk concentration plant in Blackfalds.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again through you to the minister for that answer. Given that Dairy Innovation West, DIW, is building the first milk concentration facility of its kind in Canada and given that there are 81 licensed active dairies in my constituency of Lacombe-Ponoka and further given that Alberta farmers produced almost 10 per cent of Canada's milk in 2023 and our dairy manufacturing industry employed about 3,400 people, can the minister describe how DIW's new plant will impact Alberta's dairy industry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the question. Our government recognizes the important role that the dairy industry plays in our province's economy and its prosperity. That's why we're thrilled this landmark facility is being built right here in Alberta. It will transform milk that's sourced from western producers into concentrated components, which can be transported more efficiently for further processing into products like cheese and/or ice cream. Now, having this new facility here will create a lot of jobs, high-quality jobs, and help our dairy processors save money they would spend transporting milk as far away as Manitoba for processing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and once more through you to the minister for that great answer. Given that the agriprocessing investment tax credit program has been in the minister's mandate since day one and given that the tax credit is supposed to attract large-scale investment within the agriculture manufacturing field and further given that the minister's mandate underlines the importance of investing into the long-term success of Alberta's agriculture industry, could the minister tell the Assembly how it's working and how much investment he has attracted besides DIW?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very excited to talk about our agriprocessing investment tax credit. I'm proud to say this tax credit program is doing its job to attract very large investments here in the province, resulting in \$3.5 billion in investment this year alone, including the Little Potato Company's \$39.5 million facility, JBS Canada's new \$90 million beef patty production, PNH Milling Group's \$241 million flour mill, and Imperial Oil's \$720 million renewable diesel facility, the largest facility of its kind.

Automobile Insurance Reform

(continued)

Dr. Metz: Mr. Speaker, given that the minister is using the excuse that auto insurance rates in Alberta must go up because insurance companies are not profitable, can he assure Albertans that lack of profitability is legitimate? Any company can easily show a lack of profit by spending more in a given year. It seems very convenient to invest in your company to show no profit when it also gives you an excuse to raise your rates.

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that question. It's my understanding that there is an independent regulator, the Canadian insurance board, that oversees this. They are continually monitoring the rates that come in, and they make sure that they look at the financials and do a thorough investigation so that these insurance companies cannot do what's being suggested, can't hide those profits. The other challenge that we are facing here in Alberta is that we are a shrinking island in terms of insurance across Canada. Almost every other province has publicly funded and publicly supported insurance and not a private market, which makes it much more difficult for the market to compete with a small population.

Dr. Metz: Given that current no-fault insurance schemes in Canada are not working for many people who are injured by the actions of others, how will the minister support individuals who are injured in a motor vehicle accident when they are awarded an average payout for an injury but the impact is major? Relatively minor injuries to some may end the career of another. And given that Albertans need a chance to make their own case for compensation, why won't Albertans be given the right to be paid for the actual damages they suffer?

Mr. Neudorf: Again, Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for that excellent question. This is a challenge with insurance, and often, as is the case with many things, you get what you pay for. We have high costs of insurance in Alberta right now, but we also get very high payments back if you're so lucky to make it through the legal system. Making sure that every person who is in an accident gets a reasonable return without having to wait sometimes years for that compensation and having access to care as long as they need it is the focal point of this insurance model. It is modelled on other provinces. We are learning from them and providing it to the best health outcomes for Albertans.

Dr. Metz: Given that the minister believes the insurance industry needs investment and that the province will have a huge surplus, will the minister tell Albertans why funding of the MAPS primary care agreement is being held up, apparently at Treasury Board? Our primary care system is failing. Doctors are leaving. Patients are suffering. Rebuilding could cost billions of dollars.

Member LaGrange: Well, it was kind of a weird way of asking that question. Anyways, Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, we are working really diligently to make sure that we have a new primary care compensation model up and running, working very closely with the Alberta Medical Association. The rate review committee work has been done. There are other processes we have to go through. But I'm looking forward to giving an update very, very soon and looking forward to having that program up and running by April 1, 2025, so more news to come on that and happy to share it when it comes.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose has a question.

Results Driven Agriculture Research

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the Camrose constituency we are proud to have some of the best livestock and crop producers in Alberta. Farmers and ranchers contribute prosperity not just in our area but across the entire province. In 2022 Alberta's primary agricultural exports were valued at over \$7.3 billion. These producers are always looking to boost competitiveness while ensuring farm sustainability. Research and innovation plays a key role in helping to secure a strong future for agriculture in Alberta. To the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation: can you update this House on how research dollars provided through RDAR, Results Driven Agriculture . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture.

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. RDAR has already invested in 474 research projects all across sectors in agriculture. Notable achievements include 67 best management practices adopted, products in development, 31 projects that have increased private investment in Alberta, 56 new jobs in RDAR-supported projects, 55 new crop varieties seeded, and 73 producer, public, and private partnerships. RDAR continues to ensure that critical issues are addressed and that we remain global leaders in agricultural production.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that a strong agricultural sector is critical to Alberta's food supply, export markets, and rural community sustainability and given that in 2020 the Alberta government pledged \$370 million over 10 years to support its commitment to agricultural research and further given that RDAR's producer-led research is a unique, made-in-Alberta model that is resulting in improved revenues for this sector, can the same minister outline what RDAR programs are available to support our diverse agricultural sector?

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, Mr. Speaker, in 2023-2024 RDAR's research investments were directed into four focuses, the first being the agricultural funding consortium, which invested in 50 projects worth \$12.5 million; second is the accelerating agricultural innovations, which was eight projects for \$3 million invested; the third is the RDAR open intake call, which included 23 projects with \$4.7 million invested; and the fourth is the producer research and evaluation project, which included three projects with \$110 thousand invested. This program bridges the gap from lab to field, supporting producers . . .

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister for the answer. Given that RDAR has now been in operation for four years as an arm's-length, not-for-profit organization funded through both provincial and federal government investments and given that

our government is committed to securing very positive returns on all investments for Albertans, can the same minister tell this Assembly how RDAR's governance structure, administration, and commitment to integrity, innovation, and collaboration allow it to leverage taxpayer dollars to deliver tangible benefits for Alberta's economy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Project proposals to RDAR are evaluated based on the relevance to producers. They have to show evidence of public-producer-private partnerships and demonstrate a clear path to adoption, and each funded project must include economic benefits to producers and processors. This research funding keeps our producers on the cutting edge of innovation, and our reputation as global leaders in agrifood quality and sustainability is due in part to the funding that RDAR does. As a government we are proud to support this work and, by extension, supporting our producers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Wolverine Trapping Quota

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the lifting of bag limits on fur bearers, the Minister of Forestry and Parks has done something no other minister has done. He's opened up unlimited trapping for wolverines, a species at risk. The minister has said this is to get more data about how many there are, but – what? – seems to me like a dead wolverine doesn't have much to share about how many live wolverines there are. This approach to estimating population isn't like any I as a wildlife biologist have ever heard of. Can the minister please enlighten us as to what kinds of data will be collected by lifting bag limits on wolverine trapping?

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a joy to actually talk about wolverines. This might be the first time in the Legislature we've had to have this discussion. What we found with the wolverine quota that was in place when the NDP were in government is that it had no basis. We had a wolverine quota where there were no wolverines, and we had a limited quota where there were lots of wolverines. That was indefensible. We were sitting there with a quota of more wolverines than actually exist in the province. So the quota meant nothing. It was indefensible. The NDP couldn't defend it when they were in power, and we couldn't either. Now we got rid of that.

Dr. Elmeligi: Well, given that removing the bag limits isn't defensible either, Mr. Speaker, given that wolverines have low population densities, which has led to concerns about previous limits, given that for the last 15 years researchers in Alberta and B.C. have worked very hard to estimate wolverine populations and they've suggested there are fewer than 1,000 wolverines in Alberta, given that there are 1,600 traplines in Alberta and that if each trapline caught even one wolverine, we'd likely eliminate the population, how can the minister justify yet another decision putting species at risk further at risk?

Mr. Loewen: Just like I said, the quota was higher than the number of wolverines, which meant that it was indefensible. If we look at B.C., B.C. has no quota. So we have trappers with a lot of wolverines, and just across the border, an imaginary line, there is no quota. Mr. Speaker, when we collect data from the trappers of Alberta, 1,600 trappers in

Alberta that can go around the province, they can provide us with more data, more information for wolverines so we can manage them and come up with a system that actually makes sense and is defensible.

Dr. Elmeligi: Well, given that it seems the minister has written the fourth chapter in his book about wildlife management, which is like, "Don't like the standard methodology? Make up your own"; given that the public service is currently reviewing the latest research to write a status report, which will result in wolverines being listed as threatened; given that the first step in recovering any species at risk is limiting human-caused mortality; and I've received over 200 e-mails just this weekend from Albertans protesting the trapping of wolverines and an online petition has 1,700 signatures already, can the minister explain why he doesn't want to listen to science, experts, or Albertans? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Minister of Forestry and Parks.

Mr. Loewen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Yes. We want to be able to collect that data, too, which is why we have 1,600 trappers in Alberta that will be providing us information on the wolverines. That's how the past studies in Alberta have been done, with information from the trappers of Alberta. It's only the registered trappers in Alberta, which a lot of them, in fact more than half of them, are First Nations trappers. We're going to listen to the trappers. We're going to collect the data from the people that are on the landscape, spending way more hours on than the member opposite is – that's for sure – and her biologist friends that have an ideology that they're focused on rather than the common-sense management of wildlife, which is what the Alberta trappers want to do. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Indigenous Reconciliation Initiatives

Member Arcand-Paul: Mr. Speaker, since I introduced the Reconciliation Implementation Act, the Ministry of Indigenous Relations issued a statement whereby they state that they have been, quote, actively involving Indigenous peoples in decision-making, ensuring their voices are not just heard but respected and acted upon. End quote. In drafting this bill, I travelled this entire province and met with First Nations and Métis leadership, and they were included meaningfully. Will the minister commit to passing the Reconciliation Implementation Act to show these and all First Nation and Métis people in this province that their voices are respected and acted upon?

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

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. This government takes reconciliation very seriously. I've kind of developed a couple of streams. One we call economic reconciliation – of course, everybody knows about that – and cultural reconciliation as well. We've developed several grants around these two to help the First Nations and develop some very good programs, especially around economic reconciliation. We probably lead the world in what we're doing here between what we call our Aboriginal business investment fund grants for small-stream businesses, anything from service stations to little stores and that type of thing.

Member Arcand-Paul: Given that the minister's statement said that they, quote, are making progress in economic reconciliation, education, justice, health, and more, end quote, and what we just heard from the

minister was the exact same and given that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action include reducing the number of Indigenous children in care and the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples incarcerated while economic reconciliation is a corporate call to action, will the minister actually step up and encourage his cabinet colleagues to support the Reconciliation Implementation Act?

Mr. Wilson: Thank you again for the question. One other thing we've really been working hard on is what I call cultural reconciliation, Mr. Speaker, and we've developed a stream of grants around that. One of the things I found when you travel around the province and talk to the various First Nations was that language is very important, and a lot of the First Nations are losing their language, so I've really made an effort to try to develop conferences and various ways of getting that language back, apps and that type of thing. I'm really encouraged to see a lot of the First Nations taking me up on that and really engaging their populations to get back to their language so that their young people can keep that intact.

Member Arcand-Paul: Given that this language component is in the piece of legislation that is drafted and further given that I spoke with First Nations and Métis leadership from across the province, some of whom haven't even heard from their MLAs, let alone been invited to the decision-making table, will the minister commit to meeting with First Nations?

An Hon. Member: Can't hear you. Louder. Louder.

Member Arcand-Paul: They're asking me if I'm not being loud enough.

I'm angry. Let's plan to say all the right things but not do the work, Minister? Do the right thing.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you for the question. This government has been working really hard on what I call cultural reconciliation, and one of the things we've done is that I've developed a pathway of reconciliation with all of our ministers, and everybody's embraced it. We now have what we call protocol tables. We just met with the Premier, with the Blackfoot Confederacy down there, and we worked on our protocol, everything from education to . . .

Member Arcand-Paul: You don't even know.

Mr. Wilson: . . . safety, tourism. Many things were worked on down there.

Member Arcand-Paul: Oh my God. Embarrassing.

Mr. Wilson: It's just great to see that they really embraced that, and it gives us an opportunity to really work together.

Mr. Nixon: Point of order.

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

Homeless Shelter Capacity in Medicine Hat

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the MLA for Cypress-Medicine Hat I've been meeting with constituents and service providers who are concerned about this winter season and the impact on the homeless in our community. With temperatures dropping to a record low of minus 41.4 and minus 50.1 with the wind chill this last January, it's crucial to provide the services needed to help these individuals. To the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services: what measures is our government

implementing to protect the vulnerable in Medicine Hat and get them out of the cold this winter?

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:38.

The hon. the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the hon. member for the question, who's a great advocate on this issue in his community. Across the province we're spending \$210 million on direct homeless supports this year, including \$4.2 million in the city of Medicine Hat. We're also working with the city of Medicine Hat and their community-based organizations on the two shelter locations that currently take place in Medicine Hat, bringing those shelters ultimately together into a new location in the city that will be able to serve the city for many, many years to come as well as making sure that we're increasing capacity temporarily this winter as we make sure that that long-term capacity exists within Medicine Hat.

2:40

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

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that winter conditions place increased strain on our social support systems, programs, and local service providers where local service providers have reported increased demand for assistance and support and further given the impact of Alberta's extreme cold weather temperatures on those experiencing homelessness, can the minister outline what resources and supports will be available in my community for organizations to help those in need in this heightened need during the seasonal winter season?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, the ministry right now is in active conversations with the city of Medicine Hat and their community-based organizations about increasing an additional 20 shelter spaces to their existing shelter spaces. As I mentioned, also we're working to bring the two shelters together into one location and also ultimately to a new location that will work better for the community long term. We're also investing \$3 million in the community-based organization that works with homelessness in the city of Medicine Hat. All that is also part of our overall work that we're doing across the province, including investing ultimately in long-term housing. We just announced another \$150 million for that this Friday.

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

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his answer. Given the critical role emergency shelters play during extreme winter weather and further given that our UCP government has increased funding to \$116 million to support 4,800 shelter spaces across the province, unlike the failed NDP socialist programs and ideas that encouraged encampment living, can the minister share the number of additional emergency beds in Medicine Hat this winter and how this will increase our community's capacity?

Mr. Nixon: Well, together with our partner the Mustard Seed in the case of Medicine Hat we run a 30-bed emergency shelter already in the city of Medicine Hat. We're in active conversations to increase that by at least other temporary beds as we handle this winter. Again, the overall work that's taking place in the member's community right now is about bringing those two locations together into one new shelter that will permanently serve the community of Medicine Hat going forward. This is just part of the process that we're using all across the province, dealing with that emergency issue, getting people shelter, but ultimately the goal is to continue to drive people

towards long-term housing. Again, we just made another \$150 million announcement on affordable housing this Friday.

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

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Mr. Nicolaidis, Minister of Education, pursuant to the College of Alberta School Superintendents Act the College of Alberta School Superintendents annual report 2023-2024.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that brings us to points of order. At 2:13 the Government House Leader rose on a point of order, which he subsequently withdrew. At 2:16 the Government House Leader rose on a point of order, which will be argued now.

Mr. Schow: Sure. I'm not sure the times are correct, but this point of order was called against the Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

The Speaker: Yeah. This is the one.

Mr. Schow: That's the one we have? Okay. Time flies in here, am I right, comrades?

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j), particularly the part about "makes allegations against another Member" or "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member." At the time noted, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora was speaking and said, with my unofficial records: "The Premier blamed doctors. She said that each doctor should have 1,500 patients."

Mr. Speaker, yesterday when the Premier was answering the question about physicians, that is not what she said. This is a clear misattribution to the Premier. The Premier said, and I quote from *Hansard*:

In the past doctors would take on a 1,500 patient load. If you just do the math . . . in the past 120 doctors would have been able to see 180,000 patients, which is far more than the population of Lethbridge right now. As doctors get more and more trained and they work at hospitals, they're having smaller and smaller practices, which is the reason why we are expanding the scope of practice to other health professionals, so pharmacies can do more primary care and do prescribing, and nurse practitioners . . .

Et cetera, et cetera.

The Premier clearly did not say that doctors should have 1,500 patients; that is incorrect. The members opposite are entitled to their own opinions, but they are not entitled to their own facts; no such thing. This is wrong, Mr. Speaker. You cannot continue to misattribute members in this Chamber and then post it on social media or X or whatever social media platform the member is using these days. Who knows?

An Hon. Member: Bluesky.

Mr. Schow: Oh, Bluesky, which is a whole other thing.

But anyways, Mr. Speaker, this is a point of order, and I'd ask the member to refrain from using false information in this Chamber.

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is not a point of order. This is absolutely a matter of debate. This is not that member's first day in the Alberta Legislature, where the things we say often get used out of context and against us, but in this case that's not even what happened because as the member just quoted – and I won't repeat what he said in *Hansard* – there is a clear interpretation.

The Premier is saying that there are enough doctors in Lethbridge if only they worked and carried a load of 1,500 patients. She even says that's "far more than the population of Lethbridge right now." This is a matter of debate. We are continuing debate right now, and I will note that as I was preparing for this point of order, I think the Member for Edmonton-Glenora very correctly referred to the Premier in this case. I don't see a point of order here; this is a matter of debate.

The Speaker: I do have the benefit of the Blues, and I am prepared to rule unless anyone has anything else substantive to add to the point of order this afternoon. I, too, believe that this is a matter of debate; it is literally what we come here to do. This is not a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

At 2:38 the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services rose on a point of order, and I see him now.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rose on a point of order at that time in regard to the Member for Edmonton-West Henday, who was asking a question, who is celebrating right now this point of order. Excited; there you go. Everybody, we can all recognize and give them a round of applause for wanting to celebrate this being a point of order. I think that's the challenge, what we saw with that question, which was to the Indigenous affairs minister just after the second supplemental.

The hon. member was highly emotional and very angry. I don't say that based on the fact that he was screaming in the Legislature during his question; I say it because he said so in his own comments that he was mad. As the minister of Indigenous affairs got up and gave excellent answers to the question very calmly in great detail, the hon. member called him an embarrassment, Mr. Speaker.

I can tell you that the minister of Indigenous affairs is certainly not an embarrassment, and I think it highly inappropriate for the hon. member to do that just because he was emotional at the time. I think he should rise and apologize and withdraw that behaviour. The hon. Indigenous affairs minister is the greatest Indigenous affairs minister ever to serve this province and certainly does not deserve to be treated like that.

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Out of respect for you I will not continue debate on who was the best Minister of Indigenous Relations because I have a different candidate in mind. What I will say is that during that particular question I did not hear the Member for Edmonton-West Henday heckle anything about the minister being an embarrassment. I do not believe that he said that; I believe that the minister maybe misheard or misunderstood what was said. I don't believe this is a point of order, but I don't have the Blues. I will leave that to you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I do have the benefit of the Blues, and I am prepared to rule unless anyone has anything else substantive to add to the debate. The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations was saying the following:

We just met with the Premier, with the Blackfoot Confederacy down there, and we worked on our protocol, everything from education to . . .

He proceeded. The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday said:
You don't even know.

The minister proceeded:
. . . safety, tourism. Many things [we] worked on down there.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday said:
Oh my God. Embarrassing.

I would say that on this occasion it does seem that the hon. member's comments have raised to the level of a point of order, and he can apologize and withdraw.

2:50

Member Arcand-Paul: I apologize. The minister is unsure of his files. I apologize and withdraw.

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

Mr. Williams: What?

The Speaker: Pardon me? I don't need help from the hon. Minister of Mental Health and Addiction. If you had examples of every member on this side of the Assembly apologizing without reservation, then perhaps you would have an argument. In this case, the member provided some unnecessary comment – I will give you that – and then apologized and withdrew. If members apologize perfectly every time, then perhaps I would be less inclined to comment. That's not what happens in this Chamber, as you well know.

I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.
Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Mr. Schow: Now is as good a time as any to ask for unanimous consent for something, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Yeah, that's fine. The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate you recognizing me. I rise to seek unanimous consent of the House to move to one-minute bells for the remainder of this afternoon, including the first bell in Committee of the Whole.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a request for unanimous consent, including upon moving into Committee of the Whole, which is a significant departure from a traditional unanimous consent request. Of course, the Assembly is a master of its own domain, and if they would like to do so, we would be happy to facilitate such requests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 26

Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2)

[Debate adjourned November 7: Mr. Shepherd speaking]

The Speaker: I was just saying that the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has 10 minutes remaining should he choose to use it.

Are there others that would like to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill. "No Albertan should be denied basic services for being true to themselves. This change will increase access to justice and make it clear that discrimination on the basis of gender identity and gender expression is against the law." I am quoting from the then Minister of Justice in 2015 – that would be myself – after the introduction of what was in that session Bill 7, which added gender identity and gender expression to the human rights code. It was, I would say, a historic day. We heard, I heard, and so did many of our colleagues, from a number of individuals about their experience of discrimination, and they would now have a basis to pursue that. Now, that doesn't make things perfect, but it means that in clear cases there is a basis on which to file a complaint. It means that the law is clear for everyone in this province to see. The human rights code does bind private entities. It binds employers and landlords and everyone. And on that day we moved forward to protect an entire new class of rights.

"The aim of the legislation, to ensure everyone has clarity over the rights that are protected under the Alberta Human Rights Act, should be applauded. I am confident it will pass with support from all parties." I am now quoting the then leader of the Official Opposition, now minister of energy. He was right. That bill, Bill 7, passed in the Legislature with unanimous support, support from members of the NDP but also from the Wildrose, the Progressive Conservatives, and the Alberta Party.

Many of us imagine that this progress, the progress of history, will always be in a forward direction, but the bill before us, rather absurdly, in my opinion, titled Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2), as though it were a routine set of amendments of little substance as opposed to what it actually is, is not forward progress. It is a bill which according to that legislation, which passed, again, in the House unanimously in 2015, is discriminatory on its face. So I stand before you today struggling to express the depths of my disappointment in this UCP government in bringing forward this bill and specifically in the members of this House who stood in favour of the rights of transgender Albertans a mere nine years ago and now stand against them.

It was a different time, 2015. I believed in that moment, as I believe many of us did, that the members of this House, regardless of party, came to this place to advance the interests of the people of this province. We may have had different opinions on how to do that, but I believed that we all had the same goal. Now, we believe on this side of the House, the NDP, that when you lift people up, that when you give them access to the basics, that when you ensure that everyone has what they need, you get a better and more prosperous society. The UCP tend to take a more trickle-down view. But I think now, as I look at this bill, at Bill 26, I'm not so sure of that anymore.

We stand today in a critical moment. Income inequality in Alberta is the worst in the country. Alberta has the highest unemployment west of the Maritimes. Alberta has the lowest minimum wage, the highest insurance costs, the highest utility costs, and the list goes on. But what does this bill do? What is this government spending its time on? And this isn't the only bill; it's one of three. Interfering in the relationship between a parent, a child, and their doctor. Taking away the rights of a parent to make medical decisions in consultation with their child and their doctor. In this moment Albertans have a lot of concerns. This isn't one of them. What other parents choose to decide with their child, what other children choose to decide for themselves, what doctors choose to recommend as medical treatment to save people's lives: that isn't a concern that Albertans have.

They do have concerns with the health care system, a health care system which in this moment, in 2024, is in virtual collapse, which has gotten worse and worse and worse under five years of the UCP.

Patients have died of cancer waiting to see an oncologist. What has the UCP done? Nothing. Well, that's not entirely true. They have taken some steps, but I think there's some pretty clear evidence from some pretty good experts that those steps have done nothing but make the problem worse. That, of course, is another story.

My point here is that Albertans have a lot of concerns. Albertans are struggling. They're struggling to afford the basics. They're struggling to see that their children might have a better life than they had. They are struggling because they fear for their children's education. They are struggling particularly if their children have any sort of learning difference. They are worried that their loved ones won't be able to access care in time to save their lives. Nowhere on that long list of the concerns of the people of this province is ensuring that we in this place attack the rights of the most vulnerable youth we can find. Nowhere on that list is performing polling to determine which vulnerable group is the least popular so that we can go after them. But that is exactly what this bill does.

3:00

I would urge the members of this House, particularly those who stood with us in 2015, who stood in favour of these rights in 2015, to reconsider, to reverse course, to stop for a moment and read the thousands of e-mails that have been sent to them, to us, that have been tabled in this House by my colleagues, to take a moment and reflect on the lived experience of those individuals.

This act is blatantly discriminatory, and I will make an argument directly from the act itself. When bills like this come forward, they come with legal analysis. The people who draft bills are lawyers. Bills come forward with an analysis of what the bill does and what the legal implications are, so this bill, I can only assume, came with one. We can't access that information because it went to cabinet. I mean, now we won't be able to access anything on anything the government does, but that's a different bill, isn't it? So this must have come with legal advice that said what is clear on the face of this bill, that it is blatantly discriminatory, which means that the government either threw out that advice or they chose to ignore it entirely, that they understood and knew what it said and simply proceeded anyway.

There are many examples throughout this bill, but I'll start with the first. It's on page 5, and it's an amendment to the definitions, which doesn't sound – although, honestly, in legislation the definitions tend to do a lot of work. Much like the title of this bill, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2), it doesn't sound particularly problematic, but it is. In that section the government is defining certain things. Ultimately, it will prohibit these surgeries, but it is defining what the surgeries are in this section. In this case it's (nn.01). “Sex reassignment surgery” means a surgical procedure or procedures if used to treat gender dysphoria or gender incongruence.” Then it goes on to list the procedures.

Now, the first thing to be noted about this is that these are surgeries which will be prohibited for minors, and Madam Speaker, these surgeries aren't done on minors now. Arguably, the substance of this bill is entirely ridiculous. It is virtue signalling, and that is important. Yes, it has no actual impact on anyone's lives because these are not surgeries that were being done on children now, but what it does do is tell a story. It tells a story about what's important to this government. It tells a story that tries to wipe out of existence an entire class of person. It tells those young people that this government doesn't recognize you. They don't recognize who you are. They don't recognize who you will become. They don't recognize you. This government is attempting to write those children out of existence, and how do you think those young people feel?

Mr. Williams: Point of order.

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

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Williams: Madam Speaker, it is certainly going to cause disorder in the House when members opposite accuse individuals or the entire government of writing people out of existence. This is inflammatory language certain to cause disorder and a lack of decorum here. I can assure you that this civil debate is an important one to have. I appreciate what the members opposite have to say as important contributions to the Chamber. There's no need to begin to inflame with accusations that we are writing people literally out of existence. I find it very problematic for a place of debate for a provincial conversation around important issues.

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

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I do not believe that it's a point of order. The member was talking about how certain bills presented by this government will impact the lives of countless individuals in this province. There is enough evidence, research on how these antitrans policies, when they were enacted in other jurisdictions, have impacted that population. It's completely, in this case, a matter of debate, but not even a matter of debate that these bills will have real consequences. It's not a point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I think it's important to reflect on the language which we use in this Legislature as we continue with the debate here this afternoon. It's not a point of order but a caution given to the member.

Please proceed with your remarks.

Debate Continued

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. What we were discussing is section (nn.01), which is a definition of sex reassignment surgery, which will ultimately be prohibited but only in some cases. The conversation was around the fact that these surgeries don't occur now, so this is literally virtue signalling by the government.

The really important piece of this is that it goes on to describe which procedures – and I won't list them here – can't be performed, but they only can't be performed if they're used to treat gender dysphoria or gender incongruence. So what they're saying here is that these are prohibited but only if you're trans. They're not prohibited for any other reason. It's difficult, actually, to come up with a more blatantly discriminatory example of a law on its face.

I mean, it's clear. Like, there are areas of law where there can be reasonable disagreement even when we feel strongly in our values about them, but this isn't really one of them. This is an area where it's pretty clear. Basically, they're saying that you can have the surgery if you aren't trans, and if you are, you can't. I mean, that is discrimination on a protected ground. There's no other way to put it.

The concern, I think – I mean, there are many concerns I have with this bill. Among other things, it outlaws puberty blockers. Puberty blockers: I will tell you that I know personally youth whose lives were saved – whose lives were saved – by this medication, and it's medication that is, again, decided on as between a parent, their child, and their doctor. I believe extremely strongly in people's rights to make those decisions, in parents' rights to make those decisions with their children, in children's rights to have control over their body.

Children are people. They're people. They might be younger people, but they're still people, and they deserve to have their rights respected.

They deserve to be able to make those choices for themselves, particularly when it is on medical advice, psychological advice, advice from their parents and their family and all of the important adults in their life. This government doesn't have the right to tell parents and children and doctors not to do that.

In this case the medication that they are telling parents and doctors and children that they should be denied is medication that has been proven to save lives, that has saved many lives, in actual fact. I have heard from people whose lives have been saved, from parents whose children's lives have been saved, and they deserve so much better than this.

Albertans deserve a government that is focused on their priorities. Albertans deserve a government that looks at them and says: I see you; I see your struggles; I see your fear that your parent, your spouse, your sister . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Are there other members wishing to join the debate?

The hon. minister to close the debate.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 26, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2).

While the members opposite have chosen to discuss only one element of this act, the Health Statutes Amendment Act would not only preserve choice for minors, it also supports our government's continued efforts to refocus the health care system and protect the rights of all Albertans. Through the act we would amend several existing pieces of legislation, including the Provincial Health Agencies Act, the Public Health Act, the Health Information Act, and the Health Professions Act. The proposed amendments introduced in the act reflect our government's commitment to build a health care system that responds to the changing needs of the province we proudly call home.

3:10

Last winter our government unveiled a plan to refocus the health care system. We began engaging with Albertans, and we received valuable feedback and insights that have helped shape our vision for the future of health care in this province.

The proposed amendments to the Provincial Health Agencies Act would enable our refocusing work to continue. The amendments would allow Alberta Health Services to transition from a regional health authority to a provincial health corporation accountable to the new acute-care provincial health agency. These changes would also create a new section of the Provincial Health Agencies Act to govern provincial health corporations. Specifically, it would lay out a framework that will be used to shape the future state of Alberta Health Services and any other new entities that may require incorporation as statutory corporations in the health system.

In addition, these amendments will ensure there is proper oversight and accountability, something we all want, that accountability, with sector ministers able to issue directives and oversee membership, including the ability to appoint official administrators. Provincial health corporations would be added to sections of the act that speak to system targets, consultation, agreements, and collaboration across the health system and to the list of entities that deliver health services in the province.

The amendments would also ensure that all freehold real property owned by Alberta Health Services would be transferred to Alberta Infrastructure and leased back to the health system. Other minor administrative revisions would be made to the act to enable the smooth transition to the refocused health care system.

Overall, these changes would ensure Alberta Health Services can focus on providing the best quality care to patients in hospitals and emergency rooms while giving front-line experts the supports they need to care for Albertans. I'm proud to say that we are making progress in our work to refocus our health care system, and these amendments represent the next step in ensuring we build a system that works for Albertans without disrupting the services that they rely on. Ultimately, these changes would enable us to continue laying the groundwork for the new health agencies to become operational so that every Albertan can receive the care they need when and where they need it.

Through the Health Statutes Amendment Act we are also seeking to implement several recommendations from the Public Health Emergencies Governance Review Panel, which was tasked with reviewing the legislation that guided Alberta's response to COVID-19. The panel's report highlighted the need to protect the rights of Albertans while upholding the integrity of the Public Health Act, and the amendments being introduced today would help us strike that balance. By introducing a preamble to the Public Health Act and clarifying what constitutes a public health emergency, our government would ensure that the rights of Albertans are protected and that public health measures are only taken when needed.

If passed, the amendment definition of a public health emergency would include occurrences that are urgent and temporary or the

threat of an occurrence of

- (i) an illness,
- (ii) a health condition,
- (iii) an epidemic or pandemic disease,
- (iv) a novel or highly infectious agent or biological toxin,
- or
- (v) the presence of a chemical agent or radioactive material that poses a significant [threat] to the public of an increase in disease, injuries, disabilities or deaths in excess of expectations during times of normalcy.

These amendments address recommendation 3.2 and recommendation 7.4 from the panel's report.

The Health Statutes Amendment Act also introduces a proposed administrative amendment to the Health Information Act. This amendment would designate the Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services as a custodian, enabling the ministry to better support Albertans and improve health services' planning and delivery. This amendment would also support the transition of continuing care to the Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services as part of our refocusing work.

Finally, amendments to the Health Professions Act would prohibit regulated health professionals from performing sex reassignment surgeries on minors and prohibit regulated health professionals from prescribing hormone replacement therapies, including puberty blockers, to minors for the treatment of gender dysphoria or gender incongruence.

Through a ministerial order we will outline exceptions for when a minor can be prescribed these medications for the treatment of gender dysphoria or gender incongruence. This will include an exception for minors aged 16 and 17 who have parental, physician, and psychologist approval and an exception for minors who have already started using these medications to treat their gender dysphoria or gender incongruence. The legislation would also provide the Minister of Health with the ability to make regulations identifying additional pharmaceuticals for inclusion in this prohibition. As research on the risks and benefits of treatments for gender dysphoria and minors is limited, we are imposing restraint to ensure that future choices are preserved before minors make potentially permanent, life-altering decisions.

Definitions would also be added to the Health Professions Act to provide clarity in the legislation. This would include definitions for gender dysphoria, gender incongruence, and minor. These definitions do not currently exist in legislation. We would also include a definition for sex reassignment surgery and a list of 10 current procedures that regulated health professionals will be prohibited from performing on minors. The legislation would also give regulation-making authority to the Minister of Health to identify other surgical procedures to be included in future definitions for sex reassignment surgery. As health care professions are regulated by self-governing regulatory colleges under the Health Professions Act, the various colleges would be responsible for enforcing the prohibitions through their unprofessional conduct discipline processes.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Minors who identify as transgender often grapple with complex feelings and emotions, and these policies would support them as they enter into adulthood.

Through these changes, Alberta's health policies around gender reassignment and affirmation will align with international evidence-based best practices. We're looking at the work of public health authorities in Finland, Sweden, U.K., Denmark, Norway, and, just last week, Mr. Speaker, New Zealand that have conducted reviews of the evidence related to medical gender transition for youth and have subsequently developed their own evidence-based guidelines or treatment recommendation policies. Ultimately, the U.K., Finnish, and Swedish national health care institutions all concluded, after systemic reviews, that there is insufficient evidence to determine that hormonal interventions for gender dysphoria in minors are safe and have moved toward a developmental approach.

Most recently, following the release of the Cass report in April 2024, a study that was commissioned by the National Health Service in England in 2020, the U.K. government has introduced indefinite restrictions on the prescribing and supplying of puberty-suppressing hormones, known as puberty blockers, to children and young people under 18 in the U.K. We are confident that these amendments that we have introduced will ensure that Alberta is aligned with leading jurisdictions, and we remain committed to preserving children's choices through evidence-based guidelines and treatment recommendations.

We also understand the need to provide minors who identify as transgender and their families with support and resources, and we will continue to explore ways to ensure appropriate services are available and that their rights are protected.

In conclusion, the Health Statutes Amendment Act reflects our government's commitment to build a health care system that meets the changing needs of our province. The proposed amendments included in the act enable our government to continue building a system that prioritizes patients, protects vulnerable populations, and empowers health care workers to deliver world-class care. Mr. Speaker, I urge everyone in this House to support this very good bill, Bill 26.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:19 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Jones	Sawhney
Armstrong-Homeniuk	LaGrange	Schow

Bouchard	Loewen	Schulz
Cyr	Long	Sigurdson, R.J.
de Jonge	Lovely	Sinclair
Dreesen	Lunty	Singh
Dyck	McDougall	Stephan
Ellis	McIver	Turton
Fir	Nally	van Dijken
Getson	Neudorf	Williams
Glubish	Nicolaides	Wilson
Guthrie	Nixon	Wright, J.
Hunter	Petrovic	Yao
Jean	Pitt	Yaseen
Johnson	Rowswell	

Against the motion:

Al-Guneid	Elmeligi	Loyola
Arcand-Paul	Eremenko	Metz
Batten	Ganley	Notley
Boparai	Goehring	Pancholi
Brar	Gray	Renaud
Calahoo Stonehouse	Hayter	Sabir
Ceci	Hoffman	Schmidt
Chapman	Hoyle	Shepherd
Dach	Ip	Tejada
Deol	Irwin	Wright, P.
Ellingson	Kasawski	

Totals:	For – 44	Against – 32
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[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a second time]

Bill 29

Fairness and Safety in Sport Act

[Debate adjourned November 21: Mr. Schmidt speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has 12 minutes remaining should he choose to use it.

Mr. Schmidt: The best 12 minutes of your day, Mr. Speaker.

I'm pleased to rise and continue my comments on Bill 29. When I was previously speaking to this bill, I debunked some of the alleged evidence that the members opposite were using to support this bill; namely, this claim that there are hundreds of athletes in dozens of sports that have been denied hundreds of medals. I raised the point that that was just a number made up by an organization called the Womens Liberation Front, which is also pressing for abortion on demand. Of course, the government got excited when I mentioned that they're aligning themselves with these kinds of organizations. I don't know why. The members opposite continue to cherry-pick a study here, a study there to justify their support for banning transgender athletes, transgender women specifically, in participating in women's sports.

You know, I will admit that, at first glance, if you give no thought to this, if somebody were to say, "Yes, men are stronger and faster than women," intuitively, that feels right. I mean, maybe not in my case, but I certainly know that a lot of men think that they are stronger and faster than a lot of women. The problem is that that may or may not be true, and we need to look at the scientific evidence to decide if that is, in fact, true.

That's exactly what the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport has done. They've provided a report, that was conducted in 2021, that was a meta-analysis of all of the research that had been done on transgender women in sports between 2011 and 2021, and what they found was that there is not sufficient evidence to justify banning trans women from participating in sports. The studies that

they included had biological data that was severely limited and often methodologically flawed. One of the problems was that they didn't compensate for factors such as height or body mass, and most of the studies didn't actually focus on trained trans women athletes and, in fact, used sedentary trans women as the test group. Again, there's limited evidence regarding the impact of testosterone suppression on transgender women athletes' performance. They concluded that the available evidence indicates that trans women who have undergone testosterone suppression have no clear biological advantages over cis women in elite sport.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

My friend from Banff-Kananaskis provided us another report that indicated that the International Olympic Committee and the World Anti Doping Agency tested 700 athletes in 15 sports and found that 15 per cent of the men in that group had low testosterone and that 15 per cent of the women in that group had high testosterone. The upshot of this is that the members opposite are making this claim that, because of testosterone levels, it is unfair to allow trans women, who allegedly have higher testosterone levels, to compete against cis women, who have lower testosterone levels, and what the evidence points to clearly is that we don't know if that's true. This is a testable claim, but there is not sufficient evidence yet to justify that claim.

Here's what I'm proposing to the members opposite. Let us run the experiments. The problem with the science is that there aren't enough data points, and by banning trans women from participating in women's sports, we are eliminating the possibility of future study on this issue. We will not be able to collect sufficient scientific data to decide whether or not what they claim to be true is actually true.

In response, I will offer to the members opposite that if, in fact, after sufficient study has been done and it can be proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that trans women are, in fact, stronger and faster and it's unfair for them to compete against cis women in those leagues, then I will come back and vote in favour of this legislation. But right now it is way too early to tell. It is not fair to ban them on the basis of junk science or inadequate science. Let us run the experiments and conduct the science necessary to make a fair determination.

Now, the second point that I want to make is about what this bill actually does. Members opposite are under the impression that this will ban trans women from competing in cis women's sports. If you look at the bill, that's not actually what's going on here, Mr. Speaker. They are setting up a snitch line so that people who think that they are competing against trans women can complain to the government to investigate the issue. That's what section 4 of this bill does. It sets up a snitch line that people who think that cis women are not being treated fairly in sports can report to.

3:30

Now, there is a whole host of problems, but the one that I want to emphasize is that this will in fact create more problems for cis women who are competing in sports that other cis women think are trans and don't belong in sports. I have a very high-profile example that I'd like to use to support this claim. In 2024 in the Summer Olympics an athlete named Imane Khelif competed in women's boxing, and her Italian opponent called off the fight because she felt that this woman had punched her too hard.

Now, anybody who has spent any time watching Italian athletes in action knows that they can't take a hit, Mr. Speaker, so it shouldn't come as a surprise that an Italian boxer would think that somebody else is punching them too hard. But not only did this Italian boxer make this allegation against Imane Khelif, that she was a trans woman; that allegation was then amplified by J.K.

Rowling, of all people, and now President Donald Trump, who took to Twitter to continue to allege that this woman was trans when in fact she was born as a cisgender woman, she comes from a country where transgender surgery is illegal, and there is no shred of evidence that she was a trans woman.

But she has been dogged by this allegation, and her victory in her event, in women's boxing, has been called into question for months and months and months because people will not let this issue go. That's exactly the kind of system that the government is setting up here in Alberta. If you are too good at your sport or if you don't look feminine enough and you happen to win, somebody else can call a government bureaucrat in the Tourism and Sport minister's office to say: hey, I think you need to look into this trans person who won unfairly.

Are we turning over the rules of competition in women's sports to the likes of J.K. Rowling and Donald Trump, who are just going to lodge complaints against people that they think are performing too well or don't look feminine enough to justify competing in women's sports? Is that fair? Is that the kind of system that the government wants, to harass women who are excelling in their sports out of the sports so that people who look like women and act like women, or act like the UCP's idea of what a woman should be, I should clarify, those are the only people who will be eligible to compete in women's sports once this bill has been passed? It's not fair.

The final point that I want to raise is one about what I think we need to do to improve fairness in sport. There are two things that I think the government would be better off spending their time to do. One is to enhance the profile of women's sports. You know, if you look at Canada's performance in the Olympics this year, you will note that the majority of our medallists were women. But we don't talk about that, and we don't provide the kinds of opportunities for women in sport that we do provide for men. We only have to look at the professional sports scene in our country or in North America for example.

It was funny. I was chatting with some friends the other day, and I said, you know, "Why isn't there a professional women's hockey league?" and they said, "Well, actually there is." So shame on me, I guess, for not knowing that there was a Professional Women's Hockey League, but there is. That's part of the problem with women's sports, that they don't have the kind of media attention that men's sports do. Not only that, Mr. Speaker; they don't get paid the kind of salaries that men do. I looked up the average salary of a Professional Women's Hockey League member: they make \$35,000 a year. Well, the board chair for the Alberta Energy Regulator makes that in one meeting. This is not fair, and we need to do more here in Alberta to make sure that women in sport get the same respect and fair treatment that men do. I think that we can do that by enhancing opportunities for professional sports for women here in Alberta.

The final thing that I think we need to do to enhance women's sports is to make sure that women, regardless of their class or location of birth, have fair access to the things that they need to do to excel in sports. Here's an interesting fact, Mr. Speaker. I had a look at the high school track and field records here in Alberta. In every single category in both men and women's track and field sports every single record holder comes from either Edmonton or Calgary. Now, how is that possible? Is it just the fact that the people who are born in rural Alberta are biologically inferior to athletes from Edmonton and Calgary? Absolutely not. It's the fact that the people who grow up in Edmonton and Calgary have ready access to the best trainers, the best facilities, and they probably have families who don't have to drive hours on end to allow their students to compete.

Let's bring fairness and make sure that everybody has access to those things that they need to excel in sports, not just the people in the cities.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-West Henda.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak against this bill. The UCP are legislating hate, and the ones that will suffer are trans folks but especially trans girls and women. The data is clear, and the research has shown that there are absolutely no concerns for safety or fairness when it comes to trans women participating in sport, especially when they have access to hormone therapies. But – wouldn't you guess? – trans girls in this province will no longer have access to such therapies because of another piece of regressive legislation against an even smaller number than 1 per cent of Alberta's population. For those not following, I'm referring to the regressive Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2), which prevents minors from accessing puberty blockers even in the case of precocious puberty. But I digress as we're on the topic of Bill 29, the removal of trans women in sports act, as I know it.

E-Alliance, a research hub for gender-plus equity in sport, produced a report titled *Transgender Women Athletes and Elite Sport: A Scientific Review*. Referenced by my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar, in that report it states that one of the key biomedical findings was that "available evidence indicates trans women who have undergone testosterone suppression have no clear biological advantages over cis women in elite sport."

Why are we even having this super regressive conversation today, and why has this regressive UCP government decided to go after less than 1 per cent of Albertans? Well, one word: bullying. The minister who introduced this bill said in this House the day before introducing this piece of legislation, in response to a question posed . . .

Mr. Williams: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: A point of order has been called.
The Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is giving a speech specifically referencing bullying and the minister that introduced the legislation. Unfortunately, on March 27, 2024, our current Speaker ruled against a member, where a member withdrew, for using the word "bullying." I can also note that in the past we've had a number of other instances; for example, "bullying tactics" on February 18, 1998, was also ruled out of order by Speaker Kowalski.

Mr. Speaker, accusing a member of this House of bullying is inappropriate. It has been ruled out of order a number of times. I think it's important we have respectful debate. I think the points the member opposite makes are important for this House to discuss, for us to have this substantive debate on meaningful legislation. It is also important that that be beyond reproach in terms of personal attacks against members of this House. Bullying has been ruled out of order, and I ask that the member stand and withdraw and apologize without reservation.

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, I do not believe that it's a point of order in this context. The word "bullying" in different contexts could be ruled out of order, but in this particular context the member asked why the "regressive UCP government decided to go after less than 1 per cent of Albertans? Well, one word: bullying." The member

was not referring to a minister or any one particular individual in this House. The member referred to the UCP government and its regressive policies, which have the effect of impacting 1 per cent and they think that government policy is bullying them. That's what the member was referring to. I don't think in this context it's a point of order. It was about government, not a member or minister.

3:40

The Acting Speaker: Do we have further information? I'll accept further information.

Mr. Williams: I know it's unorthodox. I neglected a third instance of "bullying" being ruled out of order on April 27, 1998, by Deputy Chair Gordon, a deputy chair at the time. The government will persist, if personal attacks are made against members of this House, in calling points of order on this question.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you for the information. Unparliamentary language is not acceptable, but it is weighed in the context that it was used. I heard very clearly from the member that the context was not against an individual member. The sentence ended, and the referral to the minister began a new sentence, so I do not believe that this is a point of order. At the same time I do encourage everyone to be very careful in what they choose, and I think the member was being careful in how he proceeded.

With that, the member from Edmonton-West Henda has about 13 and a half minutes left.

Debate Continued

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister who introduced this bill said in this House the day before introducing this piece of legislation, in response to a question posed to him by one of his colleagues, that he would not "allow safety and fairness to be sacrificed at the expense of inclusion." But then during second reading that same minister changed his tune by saying this bill "reflects the values of fairness and safety and inclusivity that are at the heart of sport in Alberta."

Further, Mr. Speaker, the minister quoted a section of a UN report during second reading about 890 athletes who have allegedly lost medals, which was from a submission of hate-filled rhetoric from a trans-exclusionary radical feminist organization titled *Womens Liberation Front*. The quote that the special rapporteur relies on is from an organization with fewer than 1,000 members across the United States, whose sole mission is "to abolish regressive gender roles and the epidemic of male violence [using legal arguments,] policy advocacy and public education." Why did the minister subversively refer to a trans-exclusionary radical feminist organization? I'm sure it's that he just was not aware.

What exactly are we talking about in this legislation? To me it exists to discriminate against trans, gender-diverse, and two-spirit youth and trans women in this province. That's it. I know the UCP is going to get into a tizzy about me saying they are bullies, which they just did, but they are.

Mr. Williams: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: A point of order has been called.
The Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I have a new point of order, this time on 23(j), language likely to cause disorder in this House. Accusing

members of this House, this time UCP members, as bullies I believe is going to continue to cause problems for substantive and civil debate. I'd ask the member opposite to withdraw, apologize, and not continue to attack members of this House.

The Acting Speaker: The Opposition Deputy House Leader.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do understand that it's a sensitive topic for the government, but the impact of these bills on communities that are impacted by them is very real, significant, and those communities have described the impact of the bill in very powerful and strong terms. In this case, again, the member did not refer to the government even or any member specifically but generally the UCP, so I don't think that it's a point of order again in this particular case.

The Acting Speaker: Members, we have to be very careful in how we proceed in all of our language. In this case I heard the allegation against UCP members, so it was identifying individuals. It wasn't identifying the government. It wasn't identifying a group. It was identifying individuals. Even though it's calling out many individuals, it's still identifying individuals, so I do believe this is a point of order. I don't have the benefit of the Blues; I'll give you that. But I want to caution everybody to understand that when we utilize words that can be interpreted parliamentary or unparliamentary, they have to be used very carefully in order to be actually acceptable in this place. If you think you've got something on somebody else, and you use unparliamentary language, it just creates massive disorder. I would ask the member to apologize and withdraw and then continue with their words.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I apologize and withdraw.

Debate Continued

Member Arcand-Paul: You see, Mr. Speaker, anti 2SLGBTQIA-plus hate is real in this province, and it is pervasive in sport. Instead of addressing the real root of misogyny and hate in this province, we are instead legislating more hatred and preventing access to sport for many other 2SLGBTQIA-plus participants, because we are normalizing hatred against a member of our family, trans women in this province, a number that is much smaller than 1 per cent of our population.

This is why I'm arguing against this today, Mr. Speaker, and I would really urge the other side to consider themselves when they boldly claim that they may be an ally to the 2SLGBTQIA-plus community. If they vote yes, they can never claim to be an ally to my community because they will have voted against the rights of one of our family members.

This bill does nothing to foster the inclusion of trans women in sport but instead reifies hatred and division. In the report tabled today by my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora, the trans murder monitoring report identified that 2021 marks the deadliest year on record, with 375 reported murders in 2021. From progress pride flags being ripped off of private dwellings or on trans logos of the T-shirts of trans-exclusionary radical feminists that have been consulted with or from the escalating hate that we saw in High River in October of this year, we are seeing an increase of hate crimes across our province.

If we do not learn from our history, we are doomed to repeat it. [Remarks in Cree]

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak?

If not, the Minister of Tourism and Sport is able to close debate.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will likely just try to be brief here, but I will respond to a couple of things I've heard through the debate up until this point. I appreciate everyone's participation in second reading. Certainly, we are not going to agree on a number of points here, but I would hope that we'd all agree that safety in sport in the province of Alberta, particularly for women and girls, is essential. It's very important to me as I've been the minister and heard stories, very concerning stories, of athletes who have found themselves in situations that have been harmful to them, where they have lost out on championships or opportunities to compete. That, in my opinion, is not okay.

Now, some of the members opposite have also brought up things that we should be doing in addition to this: if we're talking for serious, if we're really serious about sport, why aren't we doing a couple of things? I'll note a couple of them. They were saying that we are not encouraging more kids to play sports, saying that we are not affording more kids the opportunity to play because they can't afford to play sports, that we are not building infrastructure for sports, and that we are limiting the ability for us to host tournaments in our province that are provincial and national tournaments. Mr. Speaker, I have to say to all those claims: erroneous. Erroneous on all accounts. Erroneous.

I'll go through each one of them, Mr. Speaker. One, encouraging kids to play. I credit the Premier for creating the Ministry of Tourism and Sport. As Alberta's first minister of sport I have spent the last 18 months building awareness about the importance of sport, competition, and recreation among all Albertans.

Second, afford more sports. The government created, through the Ministry of Tourism and Sport, the every kid can play grant. That's a grant that gives \$8 million to cover registration fees for underprivileged children. It also covers facility rentals, equipment rentals, coaching, training, et cetera. We are making good moves in that.

Infrastructure, Mr. Speaker. The active communities initiative: we're giving \$10 million to refurbish or build recreation facilities in the province, something that the members opposite, when they were in government, failed to do. They failed to build infrastructure for sports.

Last but not least, the ability to host tournaments. We were just awarded, after the announcement of our plan to move forward with safety in sport legislation – in 2026 the Calgary Dinos will be hosting the U Sports men's basketball championship; this and countless other events that we are hosting in this province that are also funded through the major sporting events grant program.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, I will tell you this. Alberta is winning on this front. For the members opposite to suggest that we're not making steps in the right direction, I think, is completely false. It is not correct, and I don't know if they're not getting the proper information on that new social media platform they're using. Maybe it's filtering out facts. Maybe it's filtering out the truth.

[The Speaker in the chair]

But I can tell you what is happening, Mr. Speaker. In this House we're taking fairness and safety in sport very seriously, which is why this legislation is very seriously looking at how we can work on eligibility criteria so that there is a category for biological women and girls to compete in sport without the fear of being forced to compete against stronger, faster transgender athletes. That is the basis of this, and anybody within earshot or watching this online understands, if they have daughters playing sports, how important this is.

As a parent and in the presence of many other parents I believe that our number one job is to protect our children, to keep them out of harm's way, Mr. Speaker. As the Minister of Tourism and Sport I

would not be doing my job if I wasn't moving forward with this legislation to protect women and girls in sport in this province.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move second reading.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:51 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Arcand-Paul	Eremenko	Loyola
Batten	Ganley	Metz
Boparai	Goehring	Notley
Brar	Gray	Pancholi
Calahoo Stonehouse	Hayter	Renaud
Ceci	Hoffman	Sabir
Chapman	Hoyle	Schmidt
Dach	Ip	Shepherd
Deol	Irwin	Tejada
Ellingson	Kasawski	Wright, P.
Elmelligi		

Totals: For – 44 Against – 31

[Motion carried; Bill 29 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

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

Bill 24 Alberta Bill of Rights Amendment Act, 2024

The Chair: We have before us amendment A5 as moved by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul. Are there any members wishing to join the debate on amendment A5?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A5.

[Motion on amendment A5 carried]

The Chair: We're back on the main bill, Bill 24, in Committee of the Whole. The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 24, the Alberta Bill of Rights Amendment Act. I think back to – I think it was around 2016 or 2017 – a meeting that I had at my constituency office with the then chief of the Alberta Human Rights Commission, Mr. Robert Philp. Now, Bob was a constituent of mine back then. He'd make some regular visits to my office, sit down and talk about his work with the AHRC. He was a man who had great respect for that body, what it represented, and indeed for the Bill of Rights in Alberta itself.

Talking with Bob, he shared an idea he had, a proposal that I believe he wanted to bring to the Minister of Justice at the time. Bob wanted to have that opportunity to do a tour across the province. He wanted to talk to Albertans about the Bill of Rights, how incredibly important it was, talk about the work of the Alberta Human Rights Commission in supporting that Bill of Rights. Bob wanted to spend time talking with Albertans of every stripe, every background, in every corner of the province, educating them, engaging them on the Bill of Rights, and out of those conversations his bigger dream indeed was to work towards a potential update of that legislation.

Now, Bob had that dream. Bob did not get that opportunity. But I can tell you that Bob understood what should be involved in making amendments to such an important document.

4:00

Indeed, now, members opposite have talked in debate on this bill about how important it is to amend and update this document because it has been such a length of time since that's occurred. I do not disagree with them there, Madam Chair. It has been some time, so it is reasonable to look at amending. But what I do take issue with is the manner in which these amendments have come about. Really, if we are talking about a document as important as the Bill of Rights, something so essential, something so iconic for our province, if it is truly so overdue for an update on something so consequential for Albertans, it deserved a significant province-wide consultation. It deserved that dream that Bob had of extensive time, resource, opportunity provided to Albertans to weigh in on what those changes should be. But we did not see that from this government. There was no province-wide consultation. There was not even a survey. There was no opportunity for MLAs to engage. There was no opportunity for Albertans to even know.

What we saw instead is that this Premier went into backrooms, partisan spaces, with members of her own political party to bring forward a handful of tiny adjustments to placate a few Albertans. There was no broad discussion with Albertans. There was no opportunity for people to weigh in on many other things that should have been considered or included here. What we have is not a bill that reflects Alberta, Madam Chair. It does not reflect the will of Albertans. It reflects a political manoeuvre on behalf of the Premier as she faced a leadership review. The amendment that was just passed: pressure from a small faction of a single political party that represents a fraction of the population of Alberta. It's disappointing. Albertans deserve better.

We brought forward amendments. You know, the Member for Grande Prairie said that government should not be dictating the medical decisions we make. Individuals should be able to choose whether they get any medical procedure. But government members voted down the right to access reproductive health care services. That member talked about family being key, parents and the whole family unit, healthiest, best way forward, but this government voted against parents having the right to choose gender-affirming care for their children, if they so chose, with their medical professional.

The minister of energy at second reading of Bill 24 talked at length, saying: "Mr. Speaker, the law of property and property rights has been diminished somewhat by – you're not going to believe it – the state, by

governments. They have actually limited people's individual property rights, corporations' individual property rights to be able to do what they need to do on that land, to have opportunity." Yet government members voted against an amendment giving property owners the right to install and operate solar energy systems on their property.

It just goes to show, Madam Chair, that this is not a carefully considered amendment to a profound piece of legislation that impacts the lives of every Albertan. This is a small, petty, partisan exercise conducted for the small benefit of a few members of this political party and the political advantage of the Premier. That is an insult to Albertans and the work we do in this place.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein will make a donation between the dollar amount of \$40 to \$50 to the charity of her choice.

Are there any members wishing to join the debate, Bill 24, Committee of the Whole?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the remaining clauses of Bill 24 were agreed to]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:05 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

For:

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

Against:

Arcand-Paul	Elmeligi	Kasawski
Batten	Eremenko	Loyola
Boparai	Ganley	Metz
Brar	Goehring	Notley
Calahoo Stonehouse	Gray	Pancholi
Ceci	Hayter	Renaud
Chapman	Hoffman	Sabir
Dach	Hoyle	Shepherd
Deol	Ip	Tejada
Ellingson	Irwin	Wright, P.

Totals: For – 41 Against – 30

[The remaining clauses of Bill 24 agreed to]

The Chair: Two more questions for you.

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

4:10

Bill 26

Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2)

The Chair: It's its first time in the Committee of the Whole. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud rising to join debate.

Ms Pancholi: Oh, my goodness. Thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise today and to speak once again to Bill 26, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2). It's been very disappointing, of course, to hear that the government has not listened to young trans people in this province, has not listened to parents of these young people, has not listened to medical professionals. Unfortunately, I wish I was surprised, but I'm not.

I do however want to introduce an amendment which I believe will be consistent with many of the principles which the government members have claimed to hold so dear. I'd like to take this moment to introduce an amendment.

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll read the amendment into the record. The amendment reads that I move that Bill 26, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2), be amended in section 9(3) in the proposed section 1.92(1) by striking out "except in accordance with an order of the Minister under section 1.93" and substituting "except with the consent of the minor's parent, as defined in the Education Act, or in accordance with an order of the Minister under section 1.93."

Madam Chair, the intent of this amendment is simply to follow through on principles that the government has repeated over and over again, which is that parents should be the ones to be able to make choices when it comes to their children's health care. We've heard the terminology of "parents' choice" brought up a great deal by this government. In fact, I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, who in the previous debate on Bill 24, the Bill of Rights Amendment Act, 2024, spoke about many of the members from the government caucus who talked about the importance of parents being able to be involved in making those decisions in their children's lives. In fact, all of our members agree with that idea. We want parents to be involved. Absolutely, parents are a key part. This is simply making sure that parents continue to be able to be involved in the medical decisions of their children and not the government.

When we've heard the members across the way speak about this bill in particular, for some reason they've abandoned all of their commitments to the role of parents in child-rearing and education decisions and health care decisions. They claim to care so passionately about those issues on every other bill except for this one, Madam Chair. For some reason this is the one where they're willing to say that, despite whether or not a minor under the age of 18 has sought medical advice and has the consent of their parent to access hormone blockers – the government has introduced a bill that says, "No; it does not matter what the parents believe; it does not matter that the parent has consented" because they know better than the parent.

Frankly, Madam Chair, I think we should all object to the idea of government knowing better than parents. In fact, those are words that I'm pretty sure I've heard those members say over and over and over again. So why, when it comes to trans youth, are they ready to usurp the decisions made by parents with medical professionals about the health care treatment that their child needs, often, Madam Chair, for the purpose of keeping their child alive?

That is not hyperbolic. That's actually the reality for so many of these young people. They are in enormous distress, and they are seeking all medical treatments that would help them. That is what any parent would do for their child. I can certainly attest to knowing parents of trans youth who – it is not an easy process. They're working with their child to make sure, more importantly, above anything else, as any parent would do, that their child is safe, and they're going to access all kinds of medical supports and expert supports.

Let us be clear, Madam Chair. In Alberta children accessing hormone therapy have the consent of their parents to do so. There have not been cases that the government has been able to provide of situations where children under the age of 18 are accessing hormone therapy without the support of their parents. In fact, once again, we see that they are taking conspiracy theories and whatever crazy ideas that they're hearing on various social media channels and that is what's informing their positions, not what we know to be the medical evidence, not what we know to be the lived experience of trans young people and their family members, which is that to access that medical treatment, they are going to get their parents' consent. That is part of the health care system. They access psychological support. They access all those supports.

I cannot see why the government members would not support this amendment. This amendment simply says that if a parent has consented to the provision of this medical treatment, it will be allowed. I think that should be something that all members of this House agree to. It is consistent with what everything this government has said in every other area, that parents should be the ones to decide. This amendment is simply to say exactly that. The only time where the hormone blocker treatments, under this amendment, would not be provided to a minor is if the parent doesn't consent. I think we can agree on that.

Therefore, I think this should be a no-brainer for the government to support unless, Madam Chair, they do think that they know better than parents. If they think that their position is that their ideological views, the conspiracy theories that they've been subscribing to, mean that they know better than Alberta parents, I do believe that Alberta parents would reject that.

I encourage members from across the way to support this amendment. If they do not, Madam Chair, we will know for a fact that the government believes, and its MLAs believe, that they know better than Alberta parents, that they want to make decisions in a doctor's office about what access to what treatments, procedures, and therapy parents should allow for their children. They want to insert themselves into the doctors' offices of Alberta families across this province. That is what we will know to be the case if the government members across the way do not support this amendment.

I encourage them to stand true to their principles that they claim to support and make sure that where a parent consents, a young person should have access to the treatment that they need not only to lead healthy lives but to have a life, Madam Chair, because this is about life-saving treatment.

I encourage the members across the way to support this amendment.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join the debate on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to stand today and speak in support of my colleague's Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, amendment A1, that she has very eloquently introduced to us here in the Chamber in regard to bringing some recalibration back into this conversation that I am afraid has become terribly polarized, where Albertans are simply trying to make sense

of changes in legislation that will be undermining their ability to keep their kids safe.

That's what we all want. Whether you are a parent or not, a grandparent, an auntie, somewhere in your life you have young ones in your midst, and I am positive that every single one of us wants to make sure that they live happy, healthy lives, to be who they fully are and to thrive. That is not always an easy thing to do, Madam Chair.

All the more reason why we really need to ensure that this legislation is explicit about providing the capacity of those responsible, loving adults in a child's life to help them make the decisions that are best for them. That is not a responsibility of the members opposite. It's not the responsibility of the members on this side. It is those loving adults in their midst every single day that can support them with the decisions that sometimes are not easy but are incredibly important to make. The last thing we should be doing as leaders in this province is to take that right away from those adults who care about those kids.

This is a fundamental conversation about rights, Madam Chair, the rights of children, the rights of parents, the rights of medical practitioners who through years of training and education and practice have a very fulsome definition of their scope of practice. It is not the right of elected officials to interfere in what are deeply personal, complicated, challenging conversations that take place within a family.

4:20

We have seen over the course of several months here, Madam Chair, that there's been quite an arbitrary application around the definition of "competency," of "capacity." Here we are once again having to reconcile this kind of flip-flopping about who it applies to, who it does not apply to, who has rights, and who doesn't. Even though we have just spent several hours in this Chamber debating the Bill of Rights to entrench those rights in what it is to be Albertan, here we are having to stand up and debate the rights of parents and guardians to make choices with and for their children. Where are rights now?

When children haven't reached an informed age of consent, which is not a hard-and-fast rule, by the way – medical practitioners have the ability to decide whether a minor has reached a stage of maturity all the time. Sometimes it starts as young as 14. If they can understand the implications of their choices, if they can understand the long-term impact of those choices, then they deserve and are protected in their ability to have a say in what those decisions are.

To engage medical and mental health supports on behalf of the child in the best interest of a child, it is all the more important that government mind its own business and stop interfering with the precious balance that is struck between a child, their parent or guardian, and a medical provider or medical team. A parent is a critical, key stakeholder in that entire endeavour. Not once have we ever suggested anything otherwise.

What this amendment to Bill 26 does is to fully embed that philosophy straight into the legislation so that we don't have to do this kind of mental gymnastics that the government is asking Albertans to embark upon all the time. Rights are rights, and they are inexcusable, and they are definable, and they deserve to be protected. Government is taking the freedom away from parents to make an informed decision with their children.

I have received nearly 300 e-mails from constituents in Calgary-Currie on this issue. The e-mails are both heartbreaking but also inspiring. Heartbreaking because the writers often know first-hand just how much is at risk when the adults responsible for their well-being do not fulfill that responsibility, whether it be because government has interfered in that capacity or otherwise. It's also inspiring to hear all that young people can be when they are provided safety and love and the space to explore and share who they are when they are ready to do so.

I'd like to read a few pieces of that correspondence, Madam Chair, into the record from Jim, a husband and father of two. He writes:

In your announcement you have promised not to stay out of the medical decisions of Albertans but to actually bring the full power of the state to bear on a distinct group of them. Under the guise of protecting them, you are promising to remove medical choices from them. Instead of offering autonomy over their bodies in the context of comprehensive medical care, you have announced that the government, indeed the UCP cabinet, knows better and will protect doctors from offering the care such patients might seek.

From another mom in Calgary-Currie:

I'm asking you as a champion of medical autonomy and keeping the government out of medical decisions . . .

This is of course to government and cabinet and the members opposite.

. . . please don't restrict my teenager's access to gender-affirming care. The decisions to use blockers and cross-sex hormones are not medical decisions that we have made without deep consideration. As a parent I one hundred per cent believe this is the right course of treatment for my child. Parents and their doctors need to make decisions for what's best for their child, not the government.

I could go on, Madam Chair. This amendment speaks specifically to this sentiment that is not just held by constituents of Calgary-Currie, clearly, from the numerous tablings that have been made over the course of the last number of weeks, our beliefs and values and requests pleading with this government to respect the rights inherent in being a parent, to make these critical choices with our kids, make decisions with our health care providers without government holding a seat in the doctor's office.

Now, this amendment seeks to amend section 1.92, and this actually isn't the only time where such a clause has been put into legislation that prevents medical professionals from prescribing medications outside of what is a completely understood and normal scope of prescribing practice and therapeutic, kind of, application of that prescription. Of course, as the shadow minister for Mental Health and Addiction I'm very familiar with the prescriptions of hydromorphone, something that doctors in Alberta are prohibited from prescribing at the threat of significant fines simply for prescribing a medication in its therapy that it is meant to do.

I'm not sure where government has the right to interfere in what is a common practice around prescriptions, around scope of practice, around what doctors are able to fulfill in their day-to-day responsibilities as roles of physicians and specialists, but this government has decided that, no, puberty blockers and hormone treatment are okay for these folks over here, but they are not okay for folks over here even though that is a prescription that is well recognized to be a legitimate response to a disorder.

This makes me believe, Madam Chair, that this is an attack on the disorder. It is not an attack on the medication. It is not an attack on prescribers. It is an attack specifically on gender dysphoria for youth. Of all the things that we should be using our time to talk about in this Chamber, that does not feel like one that should be a priority for Albertans. Of all of the other things that we need to be talking about, this government is attacking a disorder that children have, that is not their choice, yet here we are risking penalties for health care providers, risking penalties for children and for parents simply for trying to do what is the very best for them.

I find that inexcusable when we know what is at stake, Madam Chair. We know that the mental health of children, of families, of communities is very precarious. An incredibly vulnerable group of Albertans is facing a future of inexcusable uncertainty, and I don't understand how we can stand in the Chamber and feel, on either side

of this House, that that's okay. I know myself and my colleagues on this side don't think it's okay.

Of all of the things that children in Alberta, whether they have mental illness or otherwise – they deserve a future story, Madam Chair, and I don't want to take that away from anybody, nor do I want to take that future story away from parents because that's what we all want for the young people in our lives, for them to pursue their dreams, to find someone to love, to be loved. That's all we want as parents, and that is exactly what amendment A1 is looking to achieve, that as parents we want to have a critical seat at that table.

As my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud has said, voting against this amendment is saying that government deserves a bigger seat at the table than a parent does when it comes to that child, their medical decisions, and their future stories. If my child expresses concern or fear or curiosity about their gender identity, I am happy to admit that I don't know the best way to handle it. I will one hundred per cent seek out expertise on this issue to get a professional opinion, multiple opinions on this issue. Of all the calls I will make, Madam Chair, a call to my MLA would not be one of them.

I might do a search for information from legitimate sources. For example, the American Psychiatric Association says, "Family and societal rejection of gender identity are some of the strongest predictors of mental health difficulties among people who are transgender," all the more reason to put decision-making, good, accurate, clear information in the hands of those adults around a child to be able to make the decisions together that are best for them, which is why I could not be in more support of the amendment from my colleague for Bill 26. In my experience, parents will sacrifice everything – everything – for the safety of their child. All other things come secondary to their well-being. And the fact that this government wants to remove my rights as a parent to make decisions with their best interests in mind is indefensible. What this amendment seeks to do is to achieve a little bit of a recalibration to a system that this government has disrupted with bills 26, 27, and 29 that, unfortunately, aim to fix something that isn't broken but actually will make things worse.

Thank you.

4:30

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak on amendment A1?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:31 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Al-Guneid	Eremenko	Loyola
Arcand-Paul	Ganley	Metz
Batten	Goehring	Notley
Boparai	Gray	Pancholi
Brar	Hayter	Renaud
Ceci	Hoffman	Sabir
Chapman	Hoyle	Schmidt
Dach	Ip	Shepherd
Deol	Irwin	Tejada
Ellingson	Kasawski	Wright, P.
Elmeligi		

Against the motion:

Amery	Johnson	Rowswell
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Jones	Sawhney

Boitchenko	LaGrange	Schow
Bouchard	Loewen	Sigurdson, R.J.
Cyr	Long	Sinclair
de Jonge	Lovely	Singh
Dreeshen	Lunty	Stephan
Dyck	McDougall	Turton
Ellis	McIver	van Dijken
Fir	Nally	Williams
Getson	Neudorf	Wilson
Glubish	Nicolaides	Wright, J.
Guthrie	Nixon	Yao
Hunter	Petrovic	Yaseen
Jean		
Totals:	For – 31	Against – 43

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: Seeking speakers to join the debate on Bill 26 in Committee of the Whole. The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 26, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2). I think as we just saw demonstrated by that vote on that amendment, this is not a bill about care. Despite the soft words over gentle music that were spoken by the Premier this past January, this is not a bill about supporting families or supporting youth. This is a bill about politics. This is a bill inspired by conspiracies rooted in hatred and driven by fear.

Now, this government likes to accuse us at various points of fearmongering when we stand here in the House and we talk about, for example, the challenges Albertans face as a result of our crumbling health care system, the stories we're hearing from our constituents about patients lining hospital hallways, about cancelled surgeries, about the nearly 1 million Albertans who can't find a family doctor. When we talk about our friends, families, and neighbours who are dying of cancer while sitting on months-long wait-lists to see an oncologist, when we talk about those realities, when we tell the stories of those Albertans, the members of this government tell us that we're fearmongering, exaggerating, making things up. Private members thump their desks and cheer. But the fact is, Madam Chair, we're telling the truth. Our health care system is crumbling. Albertans are suffering as a result.

Now, what isn't true, Madam Chair, is everything that's at the heart of the changes in this bill. Tens of thousands of Alberta children and youth have no family doctor; not one of them has had bottom surgery. Thousands of children in Alberta are being impacted as they watch and worry while their mother or father lives in uncertainty, not knowing how severe their cancer is while they wait to see an oncologist. Thousands more are impacted when a parent has more complex health needs. They're waiting in pain for a crucial surgery because there are no nurses or anaesthesiologists to staff the public OR because they're away working at the private clinic. None of those children are being secretly pressured or persuaded in their schools to change their pronouns, hide it from their parents, get hormone blockers or surgery.

Thousands of children and youth in Alberta may be affected by their families' inability to access medications they need or a prescription for birth control due to this government's refusal to participate in a national pharmacare plan, but no child or youth has made or can make the decision to begin treatment with hormone blockers without significant discussion with both their parents and their doctor, not to mention that there's far more evidence for the use of the relative safety of the hormone blockers to give young people and their parents time to consider whether experiencing the

puberty from the sex assigned at birth is in the child's best interests, far more evidence than there is for the use of ivermectin to treat COVID or cancer.

This legislation is not about care or concern for children. The truth is that, as I've just laid out, this government is making choices that harm Alberta children every single day. This bill is about a government cynically leveraging and choosing to amplify manufactured fear and misinformation for its own political gain. Perhaps a handful of individuals in the government caucus have actually fallen prey to that themselves. I mean, there are members in this government caucus, Madam Chair, who apparently believe and have helped to spread the repeatedly debunked conspiracy theory that there are schools putting litter boxes in their washrooms for students who identify as cats. That's the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

That's the true root of this legislation, Madam Chair. That's the basis of the evidence that this government is legislating on, a government so desperate to distract from the real damage they're doing, the ways that they're actively hurting Alberta families. They're willing to endanger the lives of vulnerable youth by creating laws based on conspiracy, misinformation, and fear.

4:40

"Now, wait," you might say. We heard the Minister of Health, members of this government talk about the Cass Review from England. Well, the Cass Review, to be clear, is a study that was commissioned by the U.K.'s National Health Service to provide recommendations for the health care of transgender adolescents. The Premier has referred to it as part of her justification for these policies, so has the Minister of Health. However, since its release the review has been the subject of a wide range of academic critiques focused on methodological issues, inconsistencies in the report. There are discussions that the review repeatedly misuses data, bases conclusions on speculation, badly misinterprets and misunderstands both evidence and the actual clinical issues involved.

In fact, the British Medical Association, the organization that represents, supports, and negotiates on behalf of all doctors and medical students in the U.K., has launched a review of that report, expressing their concerns, much as the Alberta Medical Association has been critical of this government's proposals, particularly the proposal to interfere with the doctor-patient relationship and those joint decisions of parents, children, and medical experts that all of the members of government just voted to continue to interfere with through this legislation.

Really, it's not surprising, ultimately, that this Premier, this Health minister, this government is choosing to enact such a drastic policy based on a single report and a handful of countries that the minister has cherry-picked because they already have come to a conclusion this government already believed in. That is what we've seen repeatedly. This is a government that likes to pick and choose information to confirm its own biases: decision-based evidence-making.

At times it's been incredibly overt. We think back to the 2019 Supervised Consumption Services Review Committee under then Premier Jason Kenney, who had spent years railing against the concept of providing supervised consumption sites and tried to shut down the site in Vancouver and immediately on coming into government struck a committee that – surprise, surprise – came up with a report that was exactly in line with what he had always believed already and recommended what he already wanted to do, a review that was then utterly torn apart, discredited by actual experts in peer-reviewed papers and actual academic journals.

We saw that with this government's safe supply committee, which cherry-picked experts, stacked panels with people who already agreed with the position that the government wanted to

take, landing us in the position, like what my colleague from Calgary-Currie was speaking about.

We arrive at policies where again the government is inserting itself in the doctor's office. We saw it clearly during the COVID-19 pandemic, where UCP members, even the Premier, scoured the globe to find any excuse to justify just letting COVID run wild in Alberta, looked for any jurisdiction that even barely leaned in their direction. Not based on evidence, not based on actual careful study, just on finding an excuse to do what they already wanted to do, looking for, as the Health minister talked about today, leading jurisdictions, "leading" meaning doing what we want to do.

During that pandemic and even today we have the Premier, members opposite continuing to talk about disproven treatments like ivermectin, hydroxychloroquine, as if they could be some kind of miracle drug. It doesn't matter how many peer-reviewed studies there are, how many papers coming out that show they're utterly ineffective. The conspiracy theories continue. It doesn't matter how many actual medical experts speak out. They've got a discredited nuclear medicine physician who will continue to tell them what they want to hear while grifting off desperate people living with cancer. They'll host him at a town hall.

That's the level of thought, Madam Chair. That's the level of understanding, of evidence, of consideration, of medical knowledge that we have on the changes being put forward in this bill. Again, this is not a bill about care. It's a bill about politics, conspiracy, and fear, about fearmongering about and banning practices that don't actually take place, a bill about stripping rights away from the parents of vulnerable youth and imposing the government in the doctor-patient relationship. There are many, many things this government could be doing that would actually help children, that would actually support families, rather than preying on families with fearmongering and conspiracy.

I want to be absolutely clear, Madam Chair. Let me take a moment and speak to all of the families, all of the parents out there who have been subjected to this campaign of information, which started in the far right in the U.S. four or five years ago, folks who disingenuously wanted to gain political power by preying on the fears of parents who, yes, genuinely care about their children. We don't question those parents; what we question is those who have lied to those parents, who have spread fear and misinformation that this government is now leveraging for its own political advantage.

As I said, there are many things this government could be doing to actually support children, help children, support families. They're not interested and willing. They're too far down this rabbit hole of conspiracy, too focused on their own power and opportunity and gain, and they are hopelessly out of touch with the real concerns of Albertans. It's shameful, Madam Chair. It's disgusting, but it's the decision, the choice we are seeing this government make.

So I will be joining my colleagues in voting enthusiastically against Bill 26.

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

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Madam Chair. Today I rise not only as a legislator but as a proud Albertan who believes in fairness, compassion, and in the dignity of every person. I rise with a heavy heart but a determined spirit because Bill 26, the so-called Health Statutes Amendment Act, represents a betrayal of our shared values as Albertans and Canadians. Very simply, it is a direct attack on some of the most vulnerable among us: transgender and gender-diverse youth.

Madam Chair, this bill is more than a piece of legislation. It is a symbol of cruelty, of an agenda driven by ideology rather than evidence, and of a government that prioritizes political posturing over the well-being of Albertans. This is a government that has

chosen to punch down on kids, on kids, Madam Chair, who are simply trying to live their lives authentically and safely.

Let us be clear about what this bill does. It bans gender-affirming surgeries for minors even though those surgeries are already so rare that they are almost unheard of; it restricts access to puberty blockers and hormone therapies, life-saving medical care endorsed by every leading medical authority in Canada and around the world; it criminalizes health care providers for following evidence-based standards of care; and it creates a bureaucratic labyrinth that leaves families and doctors powerless to make the best decisions for their children and patients.

Madam Chair, this government claims that this bill is about protecting children, but let's talk about what happens when kids are denied the care they need. Trans youth who cannot access gender-affirming care are at an exponentially higher risk of depression, anxiety, and suicide. According to a study done by researchers at the University of Alberta and the University of British Columbia, 67 per cent of transgender youth in Alberta under 18 have considered suicide at some point in their lives – 67 per cent, Madam Chair – more than two-thirds of all trans youth.

Do you know what reduces that risk? Gender-affirming care. A study published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* found that access to puberty blockers and other therapies significantly lowers rates of depression and suicidal thoughts amongst trans and nonbinary youth. This isn't conjecture, Madam Chair; this isn't ideology. This is what peer-reviewed studies are telling us, yet this government has chosen to ignore the evidence and play politics with the lives of children.

4:50

Madam Chair, when I look at this legislation, I see fearmongering wrapped in the language of governance. The Premier and her government want us to believe that trans youth and their families are somehow a threat to the fabric of Alberta. But let me tell you who these families really are. I've had the opportunity serving as a school board trustee to meet some of them, and they are parents who lie awake at night worrying about whether their child will be safe at school, at the doctor's office, or even in their own neighbourhood. They are kids who are already navigating a world that too often tells them they are not enough, and now they must face a government that tells them they don't belong.

This bill forces families to make impossible choices. Some will be forced to leave Alberta entirely to seek care in other provinces, adding financial burdens that many cannot afford. Others will have no choice but to watch their children suffer knowing that the care they need is just out of reach. And for what? To appease a narrow political base that thrives on division and fear. Let me ask this Chamber a simple question. What kind of government targets children, and what kind of leadership sees vulnerable youth as a problem to be solved rather than people to be protected and supported?

Madam Chair, I cannot support this, and Albertans will not accept this. This government likes to talk about parental rights. They invoke the language of choice and autonomy when it suits them, but where are those principles now? This bill strips parents of their right to make informed, collaborative decisions about their child's health care in consultation with medical professionals. It replaces those decisions with ministerial orders and arbitrary rules dictated by politicians with no medical expertise.

Imagine, Madam Chair, being a parent who knows deep in your heart and supported by your child's doctors that gender-affirming care is what your child needs to thrive. Now imagine being told by your government that your love, your advocacy, and your consent don't matter. That is the reality this bill creates. It is not about

protecting children. It is about control, it is about ideology, and it is wrong.

Madam Chair, the cruelty of this bill is compounded by the broader failures of this government's approach to health care. Alberta is in the midst of a doctor shortage, in a health care crisis. Emergency room wait times are soaring, rural communities are struggling to access basic primary care, yet instead of addressing all of these urgent issues, this government has chosen to devote its energy to restricting health care for a fraction of a fraction of the entire population of Alberta.

Let me share a few statistics. Nearly one-third of 2SLGBTQIA+ people in Canada are under the age of 25, among trans youth in Alberta 30 per cent report unmet health care needs directly related to their gender identity, and 25 per cent, 1 in 4, have considered leaving the province to access care. This government has not only failed these young people but has actively made their lives harder.

Madam Chair, let's consider the countless stories of young Albertans whose lives depend on access to affirming care. Across this province there are trans youth who with the support of their families and medical teams have begun or are seeking the care they need to live authentically, and for these youth gender-affirming care isn't a preference; it's life-saving. Studies consistently show that access to puberty blockers, hormone therapy, and supportive health care drastically reduces rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide amongst transgendered youth, and without this care many young people face unimaginable distress, often compounded by rejection, bullying, and fear.

And what does this bill do, Madam Chair? It takes away hope. It forces these young people and their families to navigate a system that denies them the tools to thrive. It creates barriers where there should be support. How many bright futures are we willing to jeopardize? How many lives are we willing to risk?

Madam Chair, this is not who we are. Alberta is a place of resilience, compassion, and Albertans value community. It is a place where we take care of one another, especially the vulnerable, yet this bill tells trans youth and their families that they are not welcome here. It tells them that their lives, their health, and their future are secondary to political gamesmanship. We cannot let this stand. We must reject this bill and demand better from our government, and we must listen to the medical experts, who have overwhelmingly condemned this legislation, and we must listen to families and stand with families who are fighting for their children's right to exist. We must send a message to every trans kid in Alberta: you are seen; you are valued; you belong.

Madam Chair, I want to speak directly to those who may be watching this debate. To the parents who are terrified about what this bill means for your child, you are not alone. To the doctors and nurses who continue to provide compassionate, evidence-based care under challenging circumstances, thank you for your dedication to your patients and to children. And to every trans youth in Alberta, you matter. You are not a problem to be fixed or a debate to be won. You are beautiful and courageous, and you deserve to live a life of dignity, authenticity, and joy.

Madam Speaker, the decisions we make in this Chamber reverberate far beyond these walls. They shape the lives of Albertans in profound and lasting ways. With Bill 26 we have a choice. We can choose cruelty, division, and fear, or we can choose compassion, equity, and evidence-based care. I know where I stand, and I urge colleagues on the other side of the House to do the right thing and stand with me and trans Albertans. Let us reject this bill, let us protect the rights and dignity of every Albertan, and let us build a province where everyone, regardless of who they are, can thrive.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. There has been important, substantive debate on this very important piece of legislation, Bill 26. The government will be bringing it up again for more debate, but at this moment, as the Deputy Government House Leader I move to adjourn debate on Bill 26.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 29

Fairness and Safety in Sport Act

The Chair: This is the first time in Committee of the Whole. I seek members wishing to join in the debate. The hon. Member for Calgary-Edgemont.

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak against Bill 29, Fairness and Safety in Sport Act. The word "fairness" resonated in my head last night as I prepared, and I had so many questions. I decided that, you know, I wanted to actually look up the official definition of what fairness is. To be fair is to be impartial. It's just treatment or behaviour without favouritism or discrimination. Yet, Bill 29 is not impartial, and it screams of discrimination.

I reflected, as well, you know, as a mom, on when my children were younger, as many of us have probably done this, and the joy of getting up on a Saturday morning in April. It could be raining, and it could be snowy, but either way we put our kids in their jerseys and sometimes over their winter jackets, and we fill our thermoses. Then we gather as a community to watch all of our children run and chase balls, kind of like a herd after that ball.

I've also had that privilege to be a dance mom, and I'm sure everybody's thinking I'm talking about my daughter. Yes, she did dance for a few years, but I'm actually talking about my son. I have been a dance mom of a boy. He was the only boy in that age group, and he danced with a group of girls. I've had so many proud moments of my son dancing his heart out surrounded by his friends that he would call "the girls."

This past weekend I had that opportunity to watch that same son. He's now the assistant coach of his hockey team. He scored two goals at two separate games during his hockey tournament, and I'd like to believe it was due to his agility because of all of his dancing.

5:00

Last year on his hockey team, though, there was a young woman, and I do believe she probably had the most penalties on that team. She was tough, and she skated fast, and she was amazing. Unfortunately, I couldn't get this information fact based because my son was in school. But she was fierce, and she played on the same level of all the other players.

You know, here's the thing when we talk about kids playing competitive sports. At the beginning of any season youth try out, and then they're placed on teams based on abilities and their skills. They're all youth. They're playing soccer. They're dancing. They're scoring goals, or they're joining the penalty box. But they're part of a community. In community we come together, and sports should be inclusive.

This bill is only going to discourage youth from participating. Bill 29 states that you want to have sports participation, but it really is just going to add more red tape for people to participate. Based on this government's announcement, this bill is the first step forward barring trans women and girls from participating in women's sports at all levels, starting at school level to being a professional athlete.

In the past decade we were finally seeing a steady growth of women's participation in organized sports with women and girls finally

being 40 per cent of the registered participants. If we're truly wanting to see fairness in sport, instead of attacking the .37 per cent population of Albertans who identify as transgender and nonbinary, how about we start focusing on equality? Women have historically faced many barriers in the workplace, and it's linked to gender discrimination. One of the most prominent gender inequality examples in today's society is the gender pay gap. Research has shown that in Canada women earn on an average 80 to 87 per cent of what their male counterparts do.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

There's a strong argument that the gender pay gap in women's professional sport is greater than any other profession's. When comparing the salaries of men and women competing in the same sport, the difference is substantial. Béatrice Frey, the sports partnership manager at the UN, said: "I cannot think of any other industry that has such a wage gap. Really, depending on country, context, and sport, a man can be a billionaire, but a woman in that exact same discipline cannot even get a minimum salary." If the government truly wants fairness in sport for women, why do they not add a provision to change the legislation so women in sport can make a claim for wage discrimination?

Canadian Women & Sport stated that girls' sports participation rates drop by 22 per cent as they enter adolescence, leading to a dropout rate of 1 in 3 girls leaving sports in their teens, and it becomes more staggering for girls with intersectional identities, as Indigenous girls have the lowest participation rate at only 24 per cent.

There are so many complex reasons why girls choose to leave sport. There's the socialization and the gender expectation, lack of consideration for social identities, structural barriers, and psychosocial barriers. The Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport has said that we need to prioritize creating an equitable sport experience for all Canadian girls. That's an important goal because we know that those with intersectional identities face more barriers to inclusion. This bill is only going to create structural barriers.

People are built different. We all have different abilities. I reflect about our caucus. We have some very avid marathon runners. I'll have to admit I am not one of them, but we do have the members for Edmonton-Strathcona and Calgary-Buffalo, who are known as running buddies. Although the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has a smaller build compared to her bigger male colleague, it's also well known that, you know, when they do their half-marathons together, she's the one crossing the finish line first.

An Hon. Member: Go, Rachel.

Ms Hayter: Yes. Go, Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

So, you know, size and hormones aren't an argument at all.

If we're wanting fairness in sport for women, could I suggest that the government commit to increasing women in coaching, officiating, leadership positions in sports? Let's look at delivering measures to increase the participation of girls and women in sport.

How about we start addressing gender-based violence in sport? Yesterday was the beginning of 16 days of activism against gender-based violence, and today here we are discussing a bill that will promote gender-based violence. Gender-based violence is committed against someone based on their gender identity, gender expression, or perceived gender and could include sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, discrimination, or harassment.

Last year a nine-year-old girl – nine years old – participating in track and field in B.C. was harassed by people because she had short hair, so they made the assumption that she must be trans. A little girl. This government is giving a free pass to harassers in the name of protecting women in sport. This makes all women unsafe,

especially Black, Indigenous, and other racialized women as well as women who are now going to be considered insufficiently feminine. We need to add gender equality into the tool box to combat gender-based violence in sport.

Last month we celebrated the Famous Five, a group of trail-blazing Albertan women who fought for the right to be persons. Though they did have some of their flaws, when we look back on history, they did fight for the right for everybody to be included.

An Hon. Member: For all women.

Ms Hayter: Women. Sorry. They fought for the right for women to be included.

The women in this Chamber stand on the shoulders of these activists and other women politicians who have come before us.

Last week we had the opportunity to hear from the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka during debate on this bill stating, "Times may change, society may change, but women's rights do not change," but here we are, in 2024, still fighting for the rights of people: all people, all women, because trans women are women.

This bill is an attack on our trans sisters as it takes their rights away from them, and I have to wonder whose rights, which rights will be taken next. So, Mr. Chair, I encourage all members of this House to vote against Bill 29 as this sports act is not fair at all to women and girls in sport because trans women are also women.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any others wishing to speak? I will recognize the Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. You know, I did have the unfair advantage to speak to this bill already, so I'm going to be really fast and just add a few of the things I didn't get to say the last time. This bill is awful and egregious and disgusting and shameful and all of those kinds of things. I'm going to say a little bit more about why I think that.

I want to zoom in on this idea about this unfair advantage, that somehow trans women have an unfair advantage over other athletes in sport. This idea is not supported by any science at all. It doesn't surprise me that the UCP is not interested in science. I mean, we've seen several times in wildlife that science is not important. I guess this is just another example of that. Really, this idea is based on the assumption that trans women have more testosterone, so let's explore that a little bit. More testosterone leads to bigger muscles, faster times, tends to be associated with being stronger and faster, but that is so wrong, Mr. Chair. Again, we find a government basing policies on stereotypes, assumptions, transphobia, and just utter nonsense.

Here's the reality check. In Judith Butler's book *Who's Afraid of Gender?* she really dives into this, and I highly recommend that all members in the House check out this book. Basically, the research shows that testosterone varies widely between and within genders. The research shows that there is considerable overlap in testosterone levels between genders: 16 and a half per cent of men have very low testosterone, 13 and a half per cent of women have higher than average testosterone, and there's a lot overlap in those levels between genders.

5:10

Zero point one six per cent of Canadians are trans women. They may or may not have high testosterone. These ideas are not correlated. Testosterone has no influence on gender, but it also – well, that's not entirely true. I guess high levels have some influence, but gender is quite fluid anyways. We think about it as being binary. It really is not. Sports performance does not correlate with predictable levels of endogenous testosterone, period. Sports performance correlates with

dedication and commitment to your sport. It correlates with training, and it actually correlates a lot with money, which I'm going to get into in a moment.

Consider that when a trans woman does well in sports, we instantly start talking about her hormone levels: oh, a trans woman won a race; she must have high testosterone. But when trans women lose races, we don't talk about the hormones at all, so in its very essence this argument around hormone levels falls away because it cannot carry into both sides of that. No other athletes defend or discuss hormone levels when they talk about winning or losing sports, only trans athletes, and that right there should tell you just how this whole conversation is about discrimination, not about fairness.

A lot of UCP MLAs in this House have spoken about protecting our girls, protecting girls in sport. As a mother of two girls one thousand per cent I agree with my colleague who was talking about how we all want to protect our girls all the time, obviously. It's particularly egregious to argue that eliminating trans girls and trans women from sports is about protecting our girls. I think that that is a gross misinterpretation of the word "protecting," but in context we must also ask ourselves: what or whom are we protecting our girls from? Are we trying to protect our girls from other girls, other trans girl athletes or trans women athletes?

I was kind of curious about: what are the biggest threats to women and girls in sports? So I did a pretty simple Google search, which I'm pretty sure anybody in this House could have done. I googled: threats to girls in sports. That took me to the Women's Sports Foundation. You might be fascinated to learn that the presence of trans athletes in sports wasn't on the list of things that are threatening women and girls in sports. But you know what was? Discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity; bullying, particularly for disabled girls in sports; social isolation; negative performance evaluations; fear of being judged for being too strong or too masculine; and, the biggest threat of all to women and girls in sports, sexual abuse. At the elite level Paralympic athletes experience sexual violence three times more than athletes who do not have some kind of physical disability. That is disgusting.

It's really funny how trans athletes wasn't on the list. Why do girls leave sports? Because there aren't as good facilities or they don't get as good playing times. They have lower quality coaches because the coaches are paid less. They get less money for training, uniforms, coaches. Girls' sports are funded less.

In a report from the UN called Tackling Violence against Women and Girls in Sport from 2023, 21 per cent of females, compared with 11 per cent of males, experienced a form of sexual abuse at least once as a child in sport. Sport has some of the most shocking cases of sexism and violence against women and girls; 29.7 per cent of females said they had been looked at in a way that made them feel uncomfortable, and 31.8 per cent of females are punished with excessive training or exercise. They're beaten with objects. They're even forced to the ground when they don't perform. Violence to girls in sports includes physical, sexual, psychological harassment, acts of coercion, arbitrary deprivation of liberty, and this violence and discrimination is a manifestation of historically unequal power relationships between men and women.

Sports are still highly dominated by men. Women of colour are really underrepresented.

So who is threatening our girls in sport? Who is conducting these egregious acts of harm on our women and girls in sports? Coaches, clinicians, senior federation staff, gym owners. These athletes may be too afraid to even report the harassment that is happening to them. The solution is not legislation that bans trans girls from sports; it's legislation that protects our girls by requiring sexual harassment training and more.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any others wishing to speak to Bill 29?

Ready for the question on Bill 29, Fairness and Safety in Sport Act?

[The voice vote indicated that the clauses of Bill 29 were agreed to]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:16 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

For:

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

5:20

Against:

Al-Guneid	Eremenko	Loyola
Arcand-Paul	Ganley	Metz
Batten	Goehring	Notley
Boparai	Gray	Pancholi
Brar	Hayter	Renaud
Ceci	Hoffman	Sabir
Chapman	Hoyle	Schmidt
Dach	Ip	Shepherd
Deol	Irwin	Tejada
Ellingson	Kasawski	Wright, P.
Elmeligi		

Totals: For – 43 Against – 31

[The clauses of Bill 29 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. We've made again more progress and had more thoughtful debate on this important piece of legislation. I move that the committee rise and report progress on bills 26, 24, and 29.

Just to reconfirm, Mr. Chair, I move that the committee rise and report progress on bills 26, 24, and 29.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-East.

Ms Pitt: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 29. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 24. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 26. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this day for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? Please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading
(continued)

Bill 34
Access to Information Act

[Adjourned debate November 19: Mr. Williams]

The Acting Speaker: The minister has 15 minutes left to speak if he so wishes.

Seeing not, any other members wishing to speak? The Member for Edmonton-South has risen.

Member Hoyle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 34, the Access to Information Act. I must say that I have some pretty major concerns over this bill and similar legislation recently introduced in Bill 33. It's really sad that we continue to see this UCP government picking fights as opposed to working collaboratively on issues that matter to Albertans. What are Albertans getting with this government? Over the last year it's felt like a whole lot of broken promises and misplaced priorities.

Bill 34 is yet another example of the incompetence coming from this UCP government. Whether it's mismanaging our health care system and exacerbating challenges that are literally resulting in our health care system crumbling or gambling with Albertans' retirement security or picking on gender-diverse youth, this government is truly all over the place.

On this side of the aisle we are fully aware that Albertans are concerned about skyrocketing utility bills, making sure they have good-paying jobs to take care of their families, and that they're able to get the care they need through our health care system. Alberta's New Democrats care about what matters most and what's most important to all Albertans. We care about making sure that families are well cared for. We believe that Albertans should be able to trust their government to do what's right when serving them, and Bill 34 flies directly in the face of that.

Every day I am inundated with e-mails and phone calls about overcrowded school classrooms, how it's impossible to find a family doctor, and with people sharing their heartbreaking stories of being unable to afford the daily necessities of life. Families are already feeling like they're drowning under the crushing rate of utility bills that are reaching \$500, \$600, even \$1,000 in some instances. The UCP's plan is setting Alberta down a path to a failing health care system, schools that are bursting at the seams, skyrocketing insurance and utility costs, and zero relief for families and their household budgets.

This government chose to increase fees to buy a home over a tax relief for Alberta families, which they promised. This government

chose funding private surgeries over building public hospitals and hiring enough nurses to staff them, which they promised. This government chose crowded classrooms over new schools and teachers that needed to be in them, which they promised. Instead of fulfilling these promises, the UCP is introducing Bill 34 to restrict Albertans' access to information. It's not fair that Albertans have to suffer while the UCP chooses to prioritize not listening to what really matters to all Albertans.

The problem, Mr. Speaker, is that this government seems to have a real challenge with transparency and accountability. Bill 34 does nothing to ease the mistrust that Albertans feel towards this UCP government. In fact, it makes it worse because Albertans are now asking themselves: what is this government trying to hide? The FOIP Act needs updating but not by a government that is set on making information less accessible to Albertans. Somewhere along the way the UCP seems to have forgotten that the best path forward to the challenges facing our province is through collaboration and not authoritarianism.

Albertans need a government focused on jobs and the economy. Statistics Canada reported that Alberta saw the second-highest jobless rate last month, and experts point out that we don't even have enough jobs to accommodate the drastic increase in people moving to Alberta. There's also no sign that it's going to slow down. During the first three months of this year our population increased by 204,000 people from the same period a year ago, the biggest year-over-year growth rate since the early 1980s, and we now have higher inflation than the national average and the highest unemployment west of the Maritimes. This UCP government is utterly failing to steward the economy and create good-paying jobs.

Access to information is a key pillar of a healthy democracy. Albertans deserve to make a decent living so they can pay their bills and take care of themselves and their families. Instead, they are continuing to see utility bills quadruple and car insurance rates more than double that of our neighbouring provinces.

5:30

How does Bill 34 do anything to address these challenges? Albertans deserve health care when and where they need it, not a crisis of no access to family doctors, crowded emergency rooms, frequent closures of rural emergency departments, delayed surgeries, and hospitals bursting at the seams. They deserve a government that listens to the front line of health care to solve the shortages, hire and retain family doctors. Albertans need these hospitals to be fixed and improved. They deserve it.

The Premier and this UCP government are careening like a pinball from crisis to crisis. Instead of showing good leadership and delivering a competent government to Albertans, they continue to severely mislead Albertans. It's reckless and incompetent. Albertans need a Premier and a government who are focused on them, not conspiracy theories and not picking fights with other orders of government.

Bill 34 is so out of touch, and it's an attempt by the UCP to cover up the layers of recklessness and incompetence they've shown over these past five years. With an access to information law governments must establish record-keeping and archiving systems, which serve to make them more efficient, reduce discretionality, and allow them to make better decisions based on factual information. There's no doubt that greater transparency maintains trust between a government and its citizens. That's because having this information is essential to hold government responsible and accountable for its decisions.

I'm wondering: what is the thought process behind this bill? Was this something necessary to address the other pressing concerns that Albertans have? I know that the members opposite are receiving e-mails and phone calls from the same Albertans saying how much they're struggling with their basic needs like affordability and

health care. This is not news to any of the members in this House. So how does Bill 34 show the government's commitment to getting to work to solve these problems?

This bill will be an overhaul of the province's access to information rules, and while the government has said that it will modernize dated policies, it's also likely to lengthen the timeline to receive documents and lengthen the appeals process.

Among the changes proposed in the bill is exempting communication between political staff and ministers as nondisclosable. However, the bill does not explicitly define who a political staffer is, and it will be left to regulations to properly define it. Without full clarity on which communications are affected by Bill 34, this opens the door to easily changing what information will be exempt from information requests. It does nothing to increase transparency. Rather, it allows the UCP government to protect themselves from communications between ministers and staff being publicly accessible.

I take grave issue with this, Mr. Speaker, because we're seeing a disturbing trend of authoritarian control coming from this government. Whether it's telling people what they can and can't do with their bodies, what they can do with their retirement security, or telling public institutions what funds they can or can't accept, we have seen this UCP government showing its true colours to Albertans.

There is no need to be taking steps to hide more information from the public. As my colleague the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall said, when we were in government, e-mails, schedules were all FOIPable because there was nothing that needed to be hidden. It is the right of every Albertan to be able to access information like this because of the accountability it brings. Communication between ministers, members, and staff is crucial to good governance and maintaining a relationship of trust between government and Albertans. So what does this UCP government have to hide? Why are they so dead set on pulling the wool over Albertans' eyes?

[The Speaker in the chair]

Bill 34 would also change the timeline around receiving FOIP requests from the current 30 calendar days to 30 business days, which could increase the response time by weeks depending on when the request was made. This bill stipulates business days as any day other than a Saturday, holiday, or day when Alberta government offices are closed. It also lengthens the appeal process to the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner by requiring the person filing the complaint to first complain to the public body they are seeking records from rather than appealing directly to the commissioner.

Just last week Alberta's Privacy Commissioner called on this government to overhaul Bill 34, stating: Bill 34 should be reconsidered and amended in order to ensure a well-functioning access to information system continues to operate in this province. End quote. That's because Bill 34 creates some of the broadest exceptions to government transparency as compared to any similar Canadian or international legislation.

It seems like the UCP likes to be at the top of the worst-of lists lately. They introduced the harshest restrictions on gender-diverse youth in the country, they placed unprecedented control on provincial entities to approve all federal funding, and just this month Alberta has seen the highest increase in consumer price index compared to this time last year. But that's not enough, Mr. Speaker. This government decided it needed to introduce legislation through Bill 34 that would be one of the largest blows to transparency seen nationally.

In our modern digital world having timely access to accurate facts is critical. Providing information from reliable sources combats all

of the misinformation out there, especially in a time when it's becoming so much more difficult to distinguish legitimate sources of information from fabricated stories and lies. Unfortunately, we've seen the UCP give legitimacy to conspiracy theories while devaluing expert opinions. This government should be doing everything in its power to keep Albertans informed, to provide them with factually correct information, and do all that they can to provide transparency and accountability. It is key to Albertans making informed decisions.

Facts are absolutely foundational to good democratic governance and accountability, and it is shameful that Albertans have to deal with a government that seems more focused on hiding information than making sure it is readily available. Unlike the UCP, we know the importance of accountable and transparent government on this side of the aisle.

I do not support Bill 34 as it stands, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others on second reading of Bill 34? The Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and speak to this bill. Bill 34, the Access to Information Act, is essentially an amendment to what used to be FOIP. The government has split freedom of information and protection of privacy into two separate bills. This is the bill that will govern Albertans' ability to access information from their government, so essentially this is the bill that will govern freedom of information requests.

Why are freedom of information requests important? They're important because democracy, at its sort of essence, the way we govern ourselves, is meant to be government by the people for the people. The people deserve to have information about how they are being governed, and that's exactly what freedom of information does. It allows public citizens, it allows reporters, it allows members of the opposition or any other party in the Legislature not in government to request information. So it's pretty important, because those things are important. Albertans deserve not just to know what laws bind them but what underlies those laws, what the purpose is, what the point is, why decisions are being made the way they're being made, especially right now with this government.

5:40

This makes a lot of changes, but one of the things I would like to focus on, because I think it is most important to Albertans, is the changes it makes regarding exemptions for communications to members of Executive Council and to Members of the Legislative Assembly within the government caucus. One of the exemptions – and these are from section 4 of the bill, "Records to which this Act applies." It's section 4(1), which is "does not apply to the following," and then it lists a whole long series of things. One of them is:

- (t) a record created by or on behalf of
 - (i) a member of the Executive Council, [or]
 - (ii) a Member of the Legislative Assembly . . .

And then there's another section.

. . . that has been sent or is to be sent to a member of the Executive Council, a Member of the Legislative Assembly or a chair of a Provincial agency.

Essentially, this is exempting all communications amongst MLAs and ministers and even chairs of provincial agencies as defined under the Financial Administration Act. That's very broad. For instance, both communications between ministers and the Electric System Operator as well as the Alberta Utilities Commission were the subject recently of fairly robust public debate, shall we say, in terms of the independence of these agencies and the direction that ministers were attempting to provide to them.

Albertans have a right to know. Albertans have a right to know when the government is attempting to interfere with the agencies that are supposed to be independent, that are supposed to act independently on their behalf. Those are important things, and in that instance the Premier had indicated that these agencies had made certain communications to her, communications which, it turns out, they didn't make at all. Right? So that was pretty relevant in terms of the government's decision and why it made its decision and the claims it made about why it made those decisions. That's just one instance. It's one instance of many in which this becomes highly relevant.

Another exemption is (u), "a record created solely for the purpose of briefing a member of the Executive Council in respect of assuming responsibility." This one is new: (v), "a record created solely for the purpose of briefing a member of the Executive Council in preparation for a sitting of the Legislative Assembly." Essentially, this is a record of how ministers are prepared to come into this place to answer questions in question period, which is supposed to be the opportunity for the opposition and the public to understand how we're governing ourselves. This is the opportunity to ask questions, but how the government prepares itself for that is now excluded from freedom of information. Things like bill notes that go to members in terms of what they're meant to say about bills, which I think – and this is probably a matter of debate, I suppose – in the case of government members are arguably incorrect in many instances.

- (w) a record of communication between
 - (i) political staff, or
 - (ii) a member of Executive Council and political staff that does not involve any other employee of a public body.

Essentially, they're exempting political staff giving recommendations. This is again, Mr. Speaker, highly, highly relevant to how this government is governing the people of Alberta. Why? Often one reason is given for why something is being done and another is. For instance, we've just had a fairly robust debate on Bill 26 and what the purpose of that is. We would argue that the purpose is to interfere with the rights of parents, to interfere with the rights of children, to interfere with the rights of medical professionals to make medical decisions. The government argues otherwise. This could be very relevant. It could be extremely relevant to an organization defending trans rights, to people out there in the community, to reporters who may be reporting on this issue, and now they can't find out what advice was given to the ministers by their political staff even if that advice was: this is blatantly discriminatory, but you should do it anyway because politics. That's a problem, Mr. Speaker. I think that Albertans really and sincerely deserve those answers.

The way we govern ourselves is incredibly important. The legislation that we bring into this House is incredibly important. I've just listed a number of examples where these new exemptions, these new ways in which ministers and MLAs in this government are in this bill exempting themselves from the normal process for public scrutiny, is highly problematic.

This has also been subject to a fairly lengthy letter from the Information and Privacy Commissioner, where they say:

New categories of exempt records can include virtually all communication between political staff and Executive Council members, (section 4(1)(t)), just referenced,

and can be especially far-reaching given that political staff can be freely defined in the regulations. Correspondence amongst Ministers and amongst MLAs are fundamental to governance and accountability and should be, with a view to the democratic principles of access to information legislation and barring some reasonable exceptions, subject to Albertans' right to access.

That's the Information and Privacy Commissioner. I'm sure that letter has been tabled in here a few times now, so I won't do it again.

This speaks to how fundamental this is to democracy, how fundamental it is for Albertans to be able to understand not just the laws that bind them but why those laws are in place, how it's relevant, why it is important. Mr. Speaker, I think it's incredibly problematic that the government feels it should exempt itself, especially because, as I have listed, there have been a number of examples of communications as between Members of the Legislative Assembly, members of Executive Council, Executive Council and the civil service, Executive Council and political staff, amongst political staff. And highly problematic here – I mean, you could have an entire discussion amongst political staff. Put one minister's name in the e-mail, in the chat, and suddenly that's it. Poof. Everything is exempt. I think it's incredibly problematic.

Mr. Speaker, it's my view that we're already seeing an erosion of this particular principle. Because of the way media has become a business, we are seeing fewer and fewer reporters. That is problematic. Essentially, what it creates is what some refer to as the postfactual error. The facts don't matter anymore. I mean, this is certainly I think being influenced by affairs south of the border, but it's definitely happening up here. There is no voice of reason anymore. There is no middle ground that assesses what is happening, that gives an independent view. It is increasingly becoming the case that the opinions of doctors and the entire medical profession and scientists are being weighed against, you know, someone that teaches a yoga class on the other side, and that's somehow presenting both of those positions as being balanced. This is because there are fewer reporters, and now those fewer reporters have access to less and less information. It's a slow strangling of the public's ability to understand how they are being governed, and this is bad for democracy at its most fundamental level.

5:50

This is not what Albertans asked for. They did not ask to cease to have access to records, to cease to have access to the ways in which they are governed. This is, in my view, a fundamental violation, this bill, of their rights to access that information. Albertans deserve to know how and why they are being governed, they deserve to know why their elected representatives are making the decisions they make, they deserve to know who is in the government's ear and why, and this act is designed to prevent them from knowing that. So, yes, it is incredibly problematic. I would urge all members of this House to seriously consider it, to sit down and read it, to read the letter from the Information and Privacy Commissioner and many others, and to vote against this bill.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for St. Albert has the call.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 34, Access to Information Act, just to sort of add to the comments of two of my colleagues that just stood up and, I think, made eloquent statements on why we should not be supporting this piece of legislation. Let me just say that, you know, a brief analysis of other Canadian jurisdictions makes me think, and my colleagues as well, that Alberta will now have the most inaccessible information request regimes in the country. That is not something to be proud of.

Now, that's not just us saying it; it's not just the opposition saying it; it's not just the Information and Privacy Commissioner saying it; it's not lots and lots of lawyers talking about this. The *Edmonton Journal* reported a year ago, in 2023, that Alberta already had one of the most restrictive regimes in Canada, and here we are in November of 2024, and this UCP government wants to make it even more restrictive. That's how they roll, Mr. Speaker. You know, I

think my colleague mentioned a couple of incidences over the last year or so where the government perhaps – where it came to light that some of the things they were doing were just not great. Clearly, there are more things that this government wants to hide, and they're doing it via legislation.

Let me add to what my colleague said about the letter. Dated November 20 of 2024, addressed to the Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction minister, it is, like, a 13-page letter. I encourage all of my colleagues – I see, you know, most are focused on other work at the moment, but I would encourage them all, if the members opposite truly believe in democracy, in a healthy democracy, because a healthy democracy needs a healthy foundation of information and transparency and respect and reciprocity in many cases . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Ms Renaud: I would encourage the members opposite to read this letter. Some of it, you know, if you don't have a legal background, is a little bit tough to understand, but the message is clear that this legislation is not doing what this government's members are saying it will do. It will not make things better for Albertans. In fact, it will assist them to hide more information.

The correspondence that I'm talking about, the 13 pages of correspondence from the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Alberta – and let me just say that I doubt that an independent officer of the Legislature takes on this task lightly, to write a letter to the minister, to the government caucus saying: this is not a good piece of legislation, and you really need to change it; you really need to think about changing it because it will damage democracy in Alberta.

I just want to draw your attention to a couple of the sections. If the members opposite are just too busy in life to actually look at the information that has been sent to them about a piece of legislation that they are putting forward, I think it is your responsibility to read that information. You can continue nodding and looking at me. Perhaps you should take your seat. Mr. Speaker, I don't know if this is normal, for people to be standing there nodding at me.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, if she would like to continue her remarks, is welcome to do so.

Ms Renaud: Yeah. I would like to continue my comments.

The Speaker: Nothing prevents a member from moving around the Assembly – you're very well versed – or standing in the Assembly. For all sorts of reasons members will do such. If you'd like to continue your remarks, you're welcome to do so. If not, we can proceed to another member.

Ms Renaud: Thank you for that clarification.

The section called New Definitions that May Impact Access Rights – and this will be found on page 6 of 13. Let me give you a little quote just to give you a taste of the information that's in this letter.

This definition limits any access request for electronic records to that which exist at the time the access . . . is made or to that which is routinely generated by a public body. This together with [another section] will exclude from the right of access any information that may reside in databases or any other electronic formats where there is a need to create a record that is not routinely generated from the data to respond to the access request.

Now, this is really important. "The requirement in the FOIP Act for a public body to create . . ." [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. Hon. members, I appreciate it may be close to 6. If you want to have private conversations, please feel free to do so in the lounges.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The requirement in the FOIP Act for a public body to create a record from a record that is in electronic form under section 10(2)(a) does not appear . . . This carve-out is . . . concerning given that most information held by public bodies is [actually] now in electronic form and the narrowing of access rights in this way may have significant effects on the rights of Albertans to access electronic information in the custody or control of public bodies.

Now, I don't know about you, Mr. Speaker, but it has not been my experience that it's very easy to get information from public bodies in this province. It is not. I know numerous organizations, some of them nonprofits, some of them private companies, that have actually filed FOIP requests to get information that they are looking for, and many of them are just sitting there in the ether. They're not responded to. Months and months go by, or they're given an estimate for information that is ridiculous, that nobody should have to pay to access information.

But it gets worse, Mr. Speaker. I'm about to run out of time, so I will just say that if the members don't have much time and want to do a little bit of investigating, if you look on page 6 and page 7 and then page 8, there are two really concerning sections that this letter draws attention to. The second is the power of the head to disregard access requests. Now, this is really important. The head of a public body is able to disregard information requests.

This represents a shift of decision-making from the Commissioner under section 55(1) of the FOIP Act to the head of a public body.

Under the FOIP Act, the Commissioner could authorize a public body to disregard a request in two circumstances.

And then, of course, the letter goes on to list those circumstances. Now, further down, if you look a little further on page 8, it then goes into detail about the power to disregard requests, and there are five areas, five bullets that I will not have time to get to.

But, again, what I wanted to say in this House is that for the Information and Privacy Commissioner to actually take the time to lay out the concerns this way, to talk about what the danger is – and not the danger to the government but the danger to Albertans. Albertans should have the right to access information that is about them, that is for them, that leads to decisions that the government caucus or cabinet make, but once again this is a government that wants to take us backwards.

I remember the day that this government got rid of the independent Election Commissioner. I thought that was horrible, you know, heading down that path of corruption where nobody wants any kind of oversight, and this has continued. This pattern has continued and now not even caring. We already knew that the FOIP process was struggling. It takes far too long for people to get information. There's a lot of stuff that's redacted that is, you know, sometimes a little bit questionable, and here we are making it even worse for Albertans.

This government and this piece of legislation are not about making life better, more accessible, more open to Albertans. This is about closing ranks, keeping secrets, hiding information from Albertans when they have the right to have it. So if members opposite respect the independent offices of the Legislature, and this is one of them, we received a 13 page letter – actually, the minister received it. I would encourage the members to look at it. Take seriously the expert that is this commissioner that has gone

out of their way to say there are a number of problems – serious problems – that you all should stop and think about and consider amending this legislation.

For that reason and many more, I will not be supporting this legislation.

The Speaker: I think for the benefit of the Assembly the time is now 6 o'clock, and pursuant to Standing Order 4(2) the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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