Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, December 3, 2024

Day 77

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

Al-Guneid, Nagwan, Calgary-Glenmore (NDP)
Amery, Hon. Mickey K., ECA, KC, Calgary-Cross (UC), 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)
Dreeshen, Hon. Devin, ECA, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Dyck, Nolan B., Grande Prairie (UC)
Eggen, Hon. David, ECA, Edmonton-North West (NDP)
Ellingson, Court, Calgary-Foothills (NDP)
Ellis, Hon. Mike, ECA, Calgary-West (UC), Deputy Premier
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Eremenko, Janet, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
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Gray, Hon. Christina, ECA, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP), Leader of the Official Opposition, Official Opposition House Leader
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Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Hayter, Julia K.U., Calgary-Edgemont (NDP)
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Wright, Peggy K., Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
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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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m. Tuesday, December 3, 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 Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, it is a great privilege and honour to introduce to you a visitor joining us in the Speaker's gallery this afternoon, Her Excellency the ambassador of Germany, Ambassador Bellmann, who was recently appointed to Canada to her position in September. Prior to her appointment Her Excellency was the assistant deputy minister to the German foreign office in Berlin, where she was responsible for multiple files, including Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

Earlier today I had the pleasure of meeting with Her Excellency and discussing how Alberta can continue to support the largest economy in the European Union, particularly in areas of technology, energy, manufacturing, and agriculture. Her Excellency is joined in the Speaker's gallery by Ruth Schwab, the honorary consul of Germany in Edmonton. I ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West or perhaps someone on his behalf. The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Member Hoyle: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the Member for Edmonton-South West I would like to introduce grade 6 students from the Kim Hung school. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my fabulous colleague the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood I'm so pleased to welcome students from St. Leo school and their teacher. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Renaud: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you some amazing advocates who are here to advocate for Barrier-Free Alberta. I ask them to please rise if they're able: Michelle Kristinson, Alison Stutz, and Stella Varvis. Please welcome them.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise because 20 years ago I made the best decision of my life in my choice of husband and mother-in-law, and they are here to watch the Assembly today. You've spoken often about how important family is to the work that we do, and it's certainly the case in my life. So I'd like to invite Neal Gray and Dr. Elizabeth Gray to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hear, hear.

The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to rise today and introduce to you Mr. Narinder Singh Pawar. He was the former Additional Advocate General from the province of Punjab in India and senior advocate of the high court and the Supreme Court of India. Also, Dr. Aditi Panditrao. I would request them to rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you and to all the members of the Assembly some wonderful guests and heroes from the Strathcona professional firefighters association. I'd like to thank Eric Lowe, Tim Moen, Casey Galenzoski for coming out to the Legislature and meeting with me today. Gentlemen, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you members of the Alberta Professional Fire Fighters and Paramedics Association, who are in town for their annual Curtis Oscar Noble Legislative Conference: Codey McIntyre, Dan Henschel, Elliott Davis, Heather Merlo-Rinke, Justin Jaeger, Joel McKay, Tyrell Sinclair, and Matt Elgie. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you Drs. Michelle Duke and Kim Bugera from the Alberta College of Optometrists as well as Dr. Cristy Franco and CEO Brian Wik from the Alberta Association of Optometrists. They are accompanied by Brookes Merritt from Big Picture Public Affairs. They're all here advocating for their profession and how they can contribute more for Albertans. Please rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Lunty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce from Radio 580 Jaskamal Chatha, Prabhdeep Brar, and Harloveleen Singh; also, to introduce from the gurdwara temple a great community leader in Beaumont, Mr. Nam Kular. I ask that you all please rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you some fantastic guests from the Beaumont Professional Centre. Please welcome the accomplished entrepreneurs Abhishek and Jasmina Jariwala and Dev Golwala. I ask you to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to welcome from the Edmonton Firefighters Union local 209 a couple of lovely folks who we had the pleasure and chance to meet with this morning: Cole Chapelsky and Kyle Wilkinson. We thank them very much for their service on behalf of all Edmontonians and everyone in

Alberta. If they could please rise and enjoy the very warm welcome from our Assembly today.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the House Mr. Brad Martin, who has worked for the fire department in the city of Lloydminster for just over 18 years and now serves as the president of the Lloydminster Fire Fighters Association. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Chamber.

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

Ms de Jonge: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce two heroes from the Chestermere fire department: member Joel Ramsay and Lieutenant Kimball Yorston, who also serves as president of local 5284. These firefighters serve one of Alberta's fastest growing communities and as a department have sent nearly 25 per cent of their members to battle the blaze in Jasper. Joel and Kimball, thank you for your service. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis. Or not.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Lali Toor, founder of Apna Hockey, a nonprofit supporting South Asian ice hockey talent. Winning the NHL's Willie O'Ree community hero award in 2020 and named in *Edify* magazine's top 40 under 40 in 2022, I ask that Lali rise to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Wiebe: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly two members from the County of Grande Prairie Professional Firefighters association: President Marc Leger and Vice-president Michael Mcleod. Their selfless and unwavering commitment to service is an inspiration to us all. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce three amazing heroes from the Medicine Hat region, part of the Medicine Hat firefighting service and association: Rob Stock, Joshua Pelletier, and Steve Thompson. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two of the best firefighters from Airdrie and all of Alberta: Tyrell Sinclair and Matt Elgie. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for introductions. We took the list from the top of those who informed the Speaker's office, in that order.

Members' Statements

International Day of Persons with Disabilities

Ms Renaud: International Day of Persons with Disabilities is an important observance and marker in time for the over 1 billion people worldwide who live with a disability. December 3 is a day to celebrate the beauty and diversity and the magic of inclusion. If you are fortunate enough to have witnessed it, you too will believe in the power and the benefits of inclusion.

In a province of almost 5 million, roughly 1.3 million Albertans live with a disability. Disabled people make up the largest minority group on the planet. IDPD reminds us to pause and evaluate how far we've come, where we're headed, and how we'll get there. We've made progress thanks to many champions past and present. Their unyielding campaigning has pushed governments for decades to make significant investments towards access and inclusion. Access enables independence and ignites innovation. Inclusion builds strong, resilient communities.

In 2024, Mr. Speaker, disability communities continue to press for comprehensive accessibility legislation that identifies, removes, and prevents barriers to access. We live in a world full of exciting innovation and progress, and we need to clear a pathway for people with disabilities to participate in this changing world. An inclusive economy benefits us all by tapping into an underutilized workforce, driving innovation, and reducing long-term reliance on social benefits. An accessible society is a strong one for its foundation of fairness and equal access to employment, education, and participation in all aspects of life.

Let this day inspire us all to build a future where nobody is left behind and nobody is left out. One year from today I sincerely hope that we're able to celebrate progress that we've made. I wish you all a happy International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod has a statement to make.

Photoradar Use in Alberta

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to commend the government for its bold and necessary decision to end the misuse of photoradar as a tool for revenue generation. Effective April 1, 2025, our government will restrict photoradar enforcement to locations where it is truly needed: schools, playgrounds, and construction zones. This move represents a significant step towards restoring fairness and transparency in traffic enforcement. It also includes eliminating speed-on-green ticketing at intersections, ensuring that photoradar devices target dangerous behaviours rather than create unnecessary fines. To support this transition every existing photoradar site in Alberta will be reviewed over the next four months. Sites found ineffective or located outside of designated safety zones will be removed, reducing the number of approved sites from 2,200 to around 650.

Our government is championing proactive traffic safety measures by encouraging municipalities to implement traffic-calming solutions. They will be encouraged to use traffic-calming measures to improve traffic safety, including speed warning signs, speed bumps, public education campaigns, and other tools designated to improve traffic safety.

The province will also help make roads safer by providing municipalities with support to re-engineer roads and intersections that have been proven to be unsafe. These tools will empower communities to address speeding issues directly while avoiding the perception of enforcement as a cash grab. Municipalities can request additional photoradar locations by proving that an area is high collision and that other traffic safety measures are ineffective. Once approved, an audit will be required every two years to evaluate the effectiveness of the photoradar in reducing collisions.

Mr. Speaker, our government is putting an end to the photoradar cash cow. This balanced approach ensures that photoradar is used strictly as

a tool to protect lives, not as a hidden tax on drivers. This government is putting Albertans first, ensuring safer roads while building public trust and enforcement systems.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Surgical Wait Times

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, on November 7 the Minister of Health said that as of August 2024 the average wait time for a hip replacement was 15.9 weeks. The most recent number provided by the Alberta Bone and Joint Health Institute states that the average time for a hip replacement is actually 35 to 95 weeks.

My constituent John has been waiting for a double hip replacement for over 137 weeks. He suffered a fall while at home waiting for his double hip replacement surgery. After an hour paralyzed on the floor waiting for an ambulance, John spent the last three months in acute care and rehab hospitals recovering from spinal surgery to regain use of his arm after the fall. He was discharged to his home, which is not wheelchair accessible, with a borrowed wheelchair and a partially paralyzed arm from his fall. He is still waiting for his hip surgery over 137 weeks later.

Mr. Speaker, that's 850 per cent longer than the minister says is the average wait time. Why did this happen? The UCP chose to fight with doctors. A six-month delay in contract negotiations with resident physicians who wanted to earn more than $20 an hour for their labour did not help. It also happened because the private clinics that the UCP fund do not take complex cases. Their practice of cherry-picking which surgeries they do on the taxpayer's dime is not improving Albertans' access to health care, nor is it decreasing wait times for people like John. The UCP government picking fights with doctors and funding private clinics over public hospitals are to blame for these excessive wait times.

The government's priorities need to be focused on minimizing the suffering of people like John, who we find in every constituency of this province.

Canadian Lunar Rover

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, today I'm delighted to highlight and share an extraordinary moment of excitement for the town and county of Athabasca. Athabasca has captured the imagination of Albertans and indeed all Canadians by being shortlisted as a potential name for Canada's first lunar rover. This vibrant region, home to over 10,000 residents, is on the brink of making history not just on Earth but on the moon. The Canadian Space Agency's lunar rover, set to explore the moon's south pole by 2026, represents an extraordinary leap in science and innovation. Its mission will search for water, analyze resources, and contribute to humanity's understanding of our closest celestial neighbour.

Among the four names being considered for this pioneering rover, Athabasca holds a unique significance. Named after the majestic Athabasca River, which journeys through Alberta from the Columbia Icefields to Lake Athabasca, this name embodies resilience, exploration, and the vital role of nature in shaping our communities.

For the residents of the Athabasca region this opportunity has sparked excitement and pride. They've encouraged Canadians to vote for Athabasca, highlighting the name's significance not only as a geographic landmark but as a beacon of northern pride and a symbol of Canadian ingenuity. If chosen, Athabasca would become a name recognized across the globe and beyond, linking the vast landscapes of Alberta to the uncharted territory of the moon. This is a testament to the innovative spirit of Canadians and our role in advancing science and exploration on the world stage.

As the rover prepares to make history, I urge Albertans to support and vote to name the first Canadian rover on the moon Athabasca. Go to the Canadian Space Agency website to access the online poll before it closes on December 20. Let us dream big and reach for the stars because with Athabasca on the moon, our impact truly knows no bounds.

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

Support for Low-income Albertans

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in the House today on behalf of Kevin Dilworth, a Calgary-Elbow constituent who is part of the Alberta Works barriers-to-employment program. Over the past few years Kevin has lived through a staggering affordability crisis and watched the cost of his home increase much faster than his income support. His life has become harder and harder. His opportunities to improve life are limited. If he gets a roommate, his support gets clawed back. If he moves in with his mom while she's battling cancer, same thing. Then the increases in petty insults like the uncertainty around the low-income transit pass, which means Kevin's already narrow existence becomes even narrower.

He relies on food banks, church hampers. His daily routine is a struggle for food and figuring out where the rent will come from. Why doesn't he just get a job? It's because he's sick, not sick enough to qualify for AISH or CPP disability, but sick enough that a day of labour is brutally hard. The barriers-to-employment program is designed for people like Kevin.

Now, as he turns 60, Kevin faces one more insult. His benefits get cut off if he doesn't apply for early CPP, and that CPP pension is effectively seized by the province, taxed one for one, as his benefit is cut back $1 for every dollar of CPP he receives. It wouldn't be clawed back the same way with employment earnings. This is unfair. Kevin can't work now, but he's worked in the past, and that pension is sent straight to the Alberta treasury.

There's good news coming for the taxpayer, though: Kevin was recently diagnosed with cancer. We all know about the social determinants of health. Cancer for somebody relying on government benefits is an early death sentence. Kevin may be gone soon, a perhaps inevitable consequence of this government's policies. Despite this, Kevin is fighting. He's fighting to keep his CPP, and he's fighting for the dignity of all Albertans to keep their pensions.

Kevin, I know many in this House consider you a loser. You don't work: old, sick, falling apart. Not me, Kevin. I don't think you're a loser. You're a hero. Keep fighting, and thank you for letting me fight with you.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are facing an unprecedented affordability crisis in this province that has reached disastrous levels, leaving families to choose between paying bills and putting food on the table. This Christmas season many Albertans, especially seniors, single mothers, people with disabilities, and youth, are grappling with the skyrocketing cost of essentials like groceries, utilities, and housing.

Alarmingly, Edmonton and Calgary have some of the highest living costs in Canada, surpassing even cities like Toronto. Electricity and heating bills have surged and grocery prices have risen, leaving families with little to no disposable income for holiday celebrations. Adding insult to injury, the UCP's removal of caps on auto insurance and utilities has exposed Albertans to unchecked corporate price gouging.

As premiums and bills balloon, the government's inaction aggravates the affordability crisis. The UCP has also shown its true priorities by filling top jobs with its allies while failing to support

ordinary Albertans. It's deeply troubling that a select few benefit and millions are left struggling to keep up with the rising cost of living.

1:50

Albertans deserve better. They deserve a government that prioritizes building a robust social safety net, invests in affordable housing, and addresses the rising cost of insurance and utilities. They deserve a government that ensures seniors can retire with dignity, young people can envision a brighter future, and single parents don't have to skip meals to make rent. Mr. Speaker, unlike this UCP government, the Alberta NDP will continue to stand with Albertans, fighting for a practical solution to the affordability crisis. The Alberta NDP believe in building an Alberta where no one is left behind. Albertans deserve a government that works for them, not against them.

Oral Question Period

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

Support for Firefighters, Doctors, and Nurses

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, we all know that our front-line firefighters perform heroic acts every day. They keep us safe, and in return they deserve respect. Firefighters are asking for our support after doing so much for Albertans. They're looking for catastrophic trauma exposure coverage, board representation on their pension plan, and additional penile and larynx cancer coverage in the WCB presumptive cancer regulation. Firefighters are in the gallery today. Their asks are clear. Will the Premier implement these changes? A simple "yes" will go a very long way.

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

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to answer to this question. I know exactly how my jobs and economy minister would answer it. He would say that we're watching what is happening in other jurisdictions. What we see happen in other jurisdictions often becomes a bit of an indicator of the direction that the industry is moving in making these kinds of coverages.

Of course, we did do presumptive coverage in the past on firefighters for structural firefighting. We're seeing some major forest fires where you do have a great level of exposure. One of the initial changes that we made is if somebody dies in the course of fighting a fire, they are covered by our heroes' fund. So we're looking at it, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Gray: That's great news, Mr. Speaker, because what is normal in other places is board representation on their pension plans.

Other front-line workers deserve to have their voices heard as well. Our doctors have been without a contract for far too long. As nearly 1 million Albertans without a family doctor know, the longer it takes for this government to sign a deal with doctors, the more that are at risk of leaving the province as we've already seen from multiple family doctors in Lethbridge. Having a deal is important and would assure Albertans that their primary care needs are taken care of. Mr. Speaker, what will it take for this government to sign the deal they've already made with doctors?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have signed the deal with doctors. We signed it in 2022 in the fall, and it was a five-year deal. Then there were additional asks that came in after that deal had been signed. But we don't want to wait until that contract comes up in 2027 to make some of those changes. We are working with the doctors to make them early. We have always told the doctors that, number one, whatever new model we come up with would be implemented in the new budget year, in April of 2025. We are working with them on some final details around that, and we're looking forward to making an announcement very soon.

Ms Gray: The Premier announced she would sign the deal 202 days ago, and doctors and Albertans are tired of waiting.

Nurses are also due for a deal. But with a large vote of 61 per cent last month they rejected the government's settlement offer. After years of this government's highest inflation in the country and a complete dismantling of the health care that was supposed to be fixed in 90 days, nurses have had enough. They deserve respect, just like our front-line firefighters and doctors. When will the government offer a fair deal to nurses that respects their work and get Albertans the nursing care that they need and deserve to improve health care?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We believe we put a great offer on the table. In fact, it was 12 per cent over four years, which would make them the highest paid nurses in the country. When we look at what we have to offer versus other jurisdictions, I think that is a measure of respect. We do want our nurses here to be at or near the very top.

We know that under the NDP they received zeros each of the years of the negotiation. The only time, actually, the nurses seem to get any pay increases is when a Conservative government is in. We're looking forward to having them reconsider that, and we hope we can come to an agreement.

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

Private Health Services Delivery

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the province has a 10-year deal with the federal government to fund public health care, but the billions of federal health care dollars that flow to this province could be at risk if this Premier gets her way and gambles with for-profit, two-tiered, U.S.-style health care. Yesterday the Premier said that this government has no chartered surgical facilities in Fort McMurray "at this time." Will the Premier do the right thing and reject this proposed private surgical facility to be a chartered one? Yes or no?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I did answer this yesterday. The Leader of the Official Opposition knows that we are not funding health care any different than they funded it when they were government. We have charter surgical centres that offer surgeries, that are fully publicly paid, outside of a public hospital. They had 40,000 surgeries that they funded that way. We have 60,000 surgeries that we're funding that way. As a result, we've been able to increase the overall number of surgeries that we're going to be able to do this year to 310,000, which will reduce waiting lists and be able to get people care within the medically recommended period of time.

Ms Gray: It's clear, Mr. Speaker, the Premier won't say no to the SMG medical complex promises of U.S.-style health care, where patients pay out of pocket for knee, hip, cataract surgeries. It says so right on the investor prospectus they've put out. It was so enticing that not one but three UCP MLAs wrote letters of endorsement for the whole project, letters to the Health minister begging her to approve it. Will the Premier do the right thing: ignore the pleas for private health care from her own bench, and cancel this and all future U.S.-style health care projects?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we are going to continue to have charter surgical centres that operate within the umbrella of the Canada Health Act, which means that as they deliver services that are covered, that are medically necessary, we will pay for them. The reason why we will do that is because it allows for more patients to be treated, it takes the pressure off the hospitals, and it allows for patients to be seen faster. There's nothing wrong with choosing a different place to receive the surgery. People don't care where they get their surgery; they just want it done.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, this project is clearly outside of the umbrella the Premier is talking about. The Premier herself has always wanted two-tiered health care. We know that. She wrote a policy paper that read: "once people get used to the concept of paying out of pocket for more things themselves then we can change the conversation on health care." That's why the Premier's phony public health care guarantee she announced right before the election was such a joke. But she can fix that today. Will the Premier cancel this Fort McMurray project, recommit herself to the Canada Health Act, and invest in public health care?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the facility in question isn't even built yet, and there is no specific plan in place for what services are going to be offered. What we deal with is in the world of today, and the world of today is simply this: we have charter surgical centres that offer treatment. It is paid for out of the public purse so that no one has to pay out of pocket. There are other potential providers of publicly funded services under contract, with services like acute care Alberta, workers' compensation, or privately paying patients from other provinces. Albertans will not pay out of pocket.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition for question 3.

Automobile Insurance Reform

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the Premier's response to public outcry over Alberta having by far the highest auto insurance rates in the country was to announce that she was making changes. Specifically, she's allowing auto insurance companies to raise the rates even higher: higher this year, higher again next year. Only this Premier would believe that raising the rates today will mean lower rates sometime in the future. Why is the Premier working so hard to protect profits of private auto insurance companies rather than considering public insurance systems that could dramatically reduce Alberta driver insurance premiums?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are taking the best part of a public insurance system, which is the care model that is being offered by a public insurer in Manitoba. It is going to ensure that you will receive up to $295,000 if there's a permanent impairment, for noncatastrophic coverage you can receive up to $187,000, you'll get care covering income loss of up to $120,000, and it won't have a limitation on how much medical care you need. If you need medical care for life, you'll get medical care for life. We're going to do all that without paying $3 billion and laying off 4,500 private-sector workers. We can have the best of both worlds, Mr. Speaker.

2:00

Ms Gray: No. Mr. Speaker, it's Alberta drivers who are going to be paying more. What the Premier is describing is a no-fault system that she is pairing with private insurers, something that has never been done before. For Alberta drivers it means higher insurance costs and losing the ability to sue an at-fault driver for proper injury compensation. Anyone with experience accessing no-fault systems knows that it can be very difficult to receive proper compensation if your scenario falls outside of prescribed limits, so why is the Premier more interested in protecting profits than she is in reducing rates and ensuring fairness for injured drivers?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Most public insurance systems have a care-first model, and that's what we are adopting. We're going to make sure that by doing so, we're delivering it in the most efficient way possible, which is using the existing framework that already exists with the private insurers able to offer it, but we are going to set what the standard is for what the minimum benefits should be. We do this all the time. We have a government-run liquor distribution system that is privately delivered. We've done this on registries, which are also privately delivered. This is actually very common for Alberta to do this. It's just one more application of that concept.

Ms Gray: It's called no-fault insurance. Renaming it doesn't change the damage that it does, Mr. Speaker.

It's ridiculous how little effort the Premier has put into evaluating a completely normal public option as a solution for the sky-high rates. The Premier has refused to look into copying the system they have next door in Conservative Saskatchewan because she says that it will cost up to $3 billion to set up, but we know it would save Albertans about the same amount of money each and every year. So my question to the Premier is: why, when insurance companies said they needed another 7.5 per cent increase, did you say yes? Why won't you deliver affordable insurance?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sorry; I'm having a hard time following what the Official Opposition Leader is asking for. She's saying she wants a full public system, which actually is a care-first model, but then she says she doesn't want the care-first model, but she wants the public system. I wish she would decide what it is she's actually asking for.

We are putting in place a no-sue system. Why are people not suing? Because they're going to have significant benefits so that they don't have to call a lawyer as their first call. They'll be able to call their family doctor. And there will be fault. The more accidents you get into and cause, the higher your insurance premiums will be, but we shouldn't be punishing the victim by preventing them from being able to get the care that they need first.

Diabetes Treatment Coverage

Ms Ganley: Many families are gearing up for Christmas, but for some the season is not so bright. Melissa Mathison and her family are making the difficult choice between Christmas gifts and the medicine that keeps her daughters alive. Both girls are type 1 diabetics, and the cost of supplies and medicine is nearly $600 a month. What does the minister have to say to this family, who are paying the cost of the UCP's decision to deny Albertans insulin just to spite the federal government?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we're working with the federal government. The federal government, as the members opposite should know, is not responsible for health care in the province. In fact, they are to work with us, so we are working with the federal government to make sure that we get the

allocation that Albertans deserve so that we can expand the services that we currently provide. We provide over 5,000 drugs in the province. We do have a comprehensive diabetic care program, but we are looking to make that even more comprehensive.

Ms Ganley: Blood sugar monitoring supplies and insulin cost this family nearly $600 a month. This quickly exhausts limited employer benefits, and the family isn't quite poor enough to qualify for government benefits. Not all employers offer health coverage, and the cost of pay-out-of-pocket health insurance can be extremely high, especially for pre-existing conditions. This family has fallen through the cracks in the UCP's programs. If they lived anywhere else in the country, help would be on the way, but the UCP would rather score political points than help out families. Will the minister reverse course and allow these children their life-saving medication?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's the reason we had a Diabetes Working Group, that gave some very great recommendations that we can look to follow. Over the last number of years we have seen increases in spending for diabetes in our province go from $437 million during the time the NDP were in to $762 million, more than double, even though the number of individuals with diabetes did not double during that time period. We are working with the Diabetes Working Group and a number of others to make sure that we are providing the services we need.

Ms Ganley: Diabetics don't need a working group; they need insulin.

Access to insulin without having to go into debt would certainly help the Mathisons, but it would help the system, too. Poorly controlled blood sugars because people are making hard choices between medicines and groceries can have lifelong consequences, consequences that are far more costly than the medicine. Access to insulin for all diabetics saves the system money. Will the minister step up, stop refusing federal money out of spite, and give this family the best Christmas present ever, the medication that keeps their daughters alive?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The province of Alberta, our government, continues to step up every single day for people with diabetes. We will continue to do that. We are taking the recommendations from the Diabetes Working Group. The members opposite should stay tuned. There's more good information and good news to come shortly. But I again want to highlight the fact that we have almost doubled what the members opposite were providing for diabetes coverage when they were in office, yet we have not doubled the number of people with diabetes. We do care about people with diabetes, and we're going to continue to care.

Automobile Insurance Reform
(continued)

Member Kayande: Mr. Speaker, the province's solution to the insurance affordability crisis is to increase the cost of insurance. The second-highest insurance premiums in this country will be allowed to increase even more. I guess that you might say that electing the UCP could cost you 15 per cent or more on your car insurance. But wait, it gets better, by which I mean worse. The province will also cap insurance payouts to injured people. You pay more for less, and when you get hurt, the insurance company can just walk away. Minister, what about this seems like it's a good idea?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, as the Premier clearly said, this is a care-first model. This is about getting care to people quicker and easier. Currently under our framework of benefits it's so meagre that if you're hurt badly, not only is it likely to not be there for you when you need it immediately, but you may have to get a lawyer and go to court to pursue it. What we're talking about is the most generous framework of any care-first model in the country, the highest income support of any care-first model in the country. I think people will be relieved to know that care is there without having to access the court system.

Member Kayande: Given that this is the same government that brought us a $100 million Turkish Tylenol boondoggle, failed health privatization scheme – cancer and heart disease are your fault. Memes and chemtrail trutherism is now embarking on a highly experimental, never seen in Canada plan to cap insurance payouts in a private insurance system. Can the minister explain what Albertans are paying for if the insurance company can simply walk away from people who've been hurt?

Mr. Horner: Well, that's not the way it works in any of the other provinces. I'm unsure why they think that works that way in Manitoba or B.C. or Saskatchewan or Quebec because it doesn't. There are mechanisms in place to ensure that people are cared for. That's the model that we're pursuing. The reason that the rates are going up is to get to the new model. We will be two years before we're at the new model, when new products can be offered and the savings can be realized. I know that's hard to understand, apparently, because we've been at this for a few weeks. But that's what we're shooting for, to get to January 1, 2027. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Member Kayande: Given that telling injured people to kick rocks won't help anyone and given that the cost of insurance will be going up while the benefit will be going down and given that insurance companies are not great at paying claims unless they're forced to by a judge and given that injured people are just the eggs we need to break in order to make the insurance omelette according to this government, why did the minister choose to protect commissions, marketing expenses, Toronto jobs, and profits while hurting injured people and making Albertans pay more for it?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we may have to have another tech briefing for the opposition. It is clear that they have no idea what they're talking about when it comes to auto insurance reform. The rate increases represent the actual costs in the system of the system that we're changing. We have profit provisions at the regulator, which we lowered, this government, from 7 per cent to 6. We also brought in a clause that if the companies were more profitable than that, they would have to pay it back as a rebate to the insurance premium payer. We're doing this for Albertans at every step and highest benefits in the country.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont has a question to ask.

2:10 Photoradar Use in Alberta

Mr. Lunty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In December 2019 government paused the introduction of new photoradar equipment and locations, and in December 2023 all photoradar sites were removed from ring

roads in Calgary and Edmonton. In the summer of 2024 the government engaged with municipalities on photoradar specifically to discuss solutions to eliminate cash cow locations and ensure photoradar is used for safety rather than revenue generation. Can the minister of transportation elaborate on how the changes that stem from those conversations restore public confidence in automated traffic enforcement?

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

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that very important question. Yesterday was a historic day for Alberta drivers. Alberta had about 2,200 photoradar sites, about four times as many as the closest province. The 70 per cent reduction in photoradar sites will focus on sensitive areas in this province: in school zones, playground zones, and construction zones. The enforcement date will be on April 1. Something that we're committed to is working with the 24 municipalities that use photoradar to make sure that they're in the right place that's actually going to improve traffic safety and not revenue generation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Lunty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that response. Given that many Albertans have raised concerns about the misuse of photoradar as a revenue-generating tool rather than a public safety measure and further given that in Alberta there were over 2,200 photoradar sites in 24 municipalities, which is more than any other province in Canada, can the same minister expand on how the review process for existing photoradar sites will ensure that only locations that demonstrate safety needs will retain photoradar enforcement?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of transportation.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When you look at vehicles versus pedestrians and roadside workers, that school zone, playground zone, construction zone, that's something where we want to make sure that there's as much visibility as possible, because at the end of the day we just want drivers to go slower in those areas. We're also including increased visibility measures for the use of photoradar because a successful photoradar program should have zero tickets. People should be going as slow as possible to go to the speed limit. We've also included municipal flexibility in this program, so if a municipality wants to go into additional locations outside of those zones, they can apply to the province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lunty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again to the minister for that response. Given that municipalities will be able to request that the province approve additional photoradar locations for high-collision areas and further given that photoradar will remain around our schools, playgrounds, and construction zones, to the same minister: what measures will the government take to ensure photoradar is used strictly for public safety purposes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There will be a two-year audit program for those on an exceptional case-by-case basis to go outside of school zones, construction zones, and playground zones. The millions in revenues that were collected in photoradar did come at the expense of public trust, and that is why we made this announcement to make sure that photoradar going forward in the province will be used in locations that are about traffic safety and not about revenue generation. We think Alberta drivers will appreciate that. They'll know that the government is being responsible with the use of photoradar as a tool to improve traffic safety.

AISH Indexation

Ms Renaud: The unemployment rate for 1.3 million Albertans living with a disability should concern us all. Failure to open sufficient pathways to education and employment means a growing reliance on income replacement programs like AISH. Single women, seniors, severely disabled Albertans with no alternatives but AISH live in deep poverty. The UCP cut AISH benefits in 2019 by deindexing, then restored benefits when oil proceeds soared, only to cut again by deindexing via Bill 32. Minister, why does your government believe AISH benefits should not be indexed to inflation?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member never misses a chance to be wrong. It's disappointing. We talk about this a lot in this Chamber. The reality is that this side of the House did index AISH payments. That member was part of a government that chose not to index AISH payments. Not one budget that NDP government put in had indexation associated with AISH. This government did. It has for every budget since the current Premier has been Premier. In this upcoming year it will be indexed at 2 per cent, making sure that those who are on AISH can keep up with inflation inside our communities. That's why we take it as a high priority, and we're going to continue to fund AISH as the highest in the province.

Ms Renaud: Given that the average inflation rate over the last three years was 4.5 per cent and the unemployment rate for disabled Albertans remains twice what it is for their nondisabled peers and given that people with disabilities over 25 years of age are more likely to have an after-tax income of $20,000 or less, it's easy to understand why when inflation peaks, they suffer. Given extreme reliance on food banks and the growth of homelessness of disabled Albertans, it stands to reason that this is a group that needs inflation-proofing. Again, Minister, why does your government believe AISH benefits should not be indexed to inflation?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, again, I think the hon. member is struggling to hear. Last year AISH was indexed to 4.25 per cent, in line with inflation at the time. We would have made the AISH indexation equation at that time of the year in anticipation of the budget. This year it will be at about 2 per cent; that's in line with inflation. We're committed to continuing to index AISH. Again, that's the only government that has ever done it, a Conservative government. The NDP wants to keep standing up and asking us to index AISH. Please take yes for an answer. Let's get on with the rest of the work and making life better for Albertans.

Ms Renaud: Given this UCP government is well aware that disabled Albertans continue to experience alarming rates of unemployment due to lack of investment and employment opportunities and other things and given this UCP government knows that what they've done is decouple AISH from inflation – 2 per cent is not inflation, not at all, Mr. Speaker – my question to the minister is this: how do you justify raising MLA housing allowance by 14 per cent while capping AISH, income support, and the seniors' benefit at 2 per cent when the rate of inflation is higher than the cap?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, at the time that we made the AISH inflation equation for this year, inflation was actually less than 2 per cent, so we're going to be doing it at higher than inflation. Again, take yes for

an answer. What I do agree with the hon. member about is that, unfortunately, the way the AISH program has been built makes it harder for those who are facing disabilities to be able to contribute in the workforce. I know they want to. I've heard them loud and clear on that. Rest assured – stay tuned – this government is going to fix that, too.

Provincial Fiscal Position

Mr. Ellingson: The Finance minister recently released the second-quarter update. He painted a rosy picture of Alberta, reporting a higher than budgeted surplus, but while the energy sector benefits from oil averaging $75 a barrel, the average Albertan does not. The real purchasing power for Alberta workers has fallen 10 per cent in the last decade as Alberta experienced the highest inflation in the country. How can the minister ignore the fact that most Albertans are struggling to pay for groceries while they seek this now elusive Alberta advantage?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to give the second-quarter announcement. I wouldn't say that I painted it as rosy. The situation has improved for Alberta in this fiscal year, mostly due to the sensitivities around the price of oil. We're still slightly above our forecasting $74 for year-to-date – everyone's seen where oil has been since September – but it's largely due to a stable and growing economy, a narrower light-heavy differential, and the fact that we've been able to stay within our contingency while making big spends in health, education, and social services.

Mr. Ellingson: Given that some 250,000 public-sector workers are negotiating contracts while the cost of housing, utilities, and auto insurance has skyrocketed, given that this government has suppressed public-sector and low-wage workers since 2019, including refusing to raise the minimum wage with the cost of living, and given that wages in Alberta used to be 17 per cent more than the national average but today we lead by only 3 per cent, how can this government be dragging their feet, meddling in contract negotiations with doctors, nurses, teachers, and more?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I would think the opposition party would know, with their close ties to the labour movement, that we certainly don't meddle in public negotiations. In fact, we don't discuss them; that's left at the tables. I'm sure we'll reach a fair deal with all big six unions at some point. I think everybody in this Chamber should hope for that. But I would say that what Q2 represents: it's a better position at a moment in time in this fiscal year, and we're very concerned about what Budget '25 means. Everyone's seen the price of oil, and all of the pressures that the member just noted we feel, too, on this side of the House.

Mr. Ellingson: Given that the minister is recognizing that things look good now but we need to be cautious about next year and that the minister has said the government would struggle to balance the budget if oil was below $70 and many analysts are forecasting that very outcome, what services to Albertans is the minister prepared to cut in the next budget? Those promised new schools along with their elusive tax cut, or are you going to balance the budget by cutting critical social services to Alberta's most vulnerable?

2:20

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the beauty of the fiscal framework and why it's so important that we stick to it in these years, in these good years when you're in a surplus position in Q2, is because it prepares you for the years that you can't. Now, I certainly hope that the circumstances are great for the province next year and in the out-years that follow, but if they aren't, what it allows us to do is not overreact and need to cut our way out of it. It means that we may have to run a deficit here and there, but it means that we need to manage the surpluses accordingly. That's what takes us off the roller coaster.

Forestry Industry

Mr. Wiebe: Mr. Speaker, it's that time of the year again to celebrate Christmas. The Christmas tree outside the Alberta Legislature will be lit up tonight and will serve as a shining symbol of the holiday season upon us. Given that the Christmas tree highlights a vital role in the forestry sector that it plays in supporting our economy and spreading holiday cheer, can the Minister of Forestry and Parks share how supporting Alberta's forestry sector helps brighten the holidays for local workers and communities while showcasing the province's commitment to responsible management and tradition?

The Speaker: I think a "you're welcome" is in order here.

The hon. the minister of forestry.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the question. It's wonderful to celebrate the Christmas season with such a beautiful tree outside the Legislature. This 71-foot tree was harvested just 18 kilometres northwest of Edson by an Alberta forestry employee who's been doing this for 27 years. This local tree, which came to us straight from Alberta's forests, is a shining symbol of our thriving forestry sector, which not only supports our economy but also our local communities. As we light the tree tonight, we celebrate not only the holiday season that will soon be upon us but also the hard work of those in forestry who ensure responsible forest management while bringing holiday cheer to Albertans.

Mr. Wiebe: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's forestry sector is a major driver in the economic activity of supporting numerous communities across the province. Given that the forestry sector provides significant employment in Alberta, especially in rural areas, and since it generates substantial economic output for the province which is essential to both provincial and local economies, can the same minister comment on what steps the government is taking to ensure continued growth and stability in this key industry and why its contributions are so valuable to Albertans?

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Alberta's forestry sector is a powerhouse for our economy, employing over 30,000 Albertans in good-paying jobs and stable jobs at that. It is the largest employer in over 70 communities in our province, many of which are rural areas where these jobs are especially vital, and it produces over $14 billion in economic output, driving significant growth and prosperity for both provincial and local economies. By balancing economic development with responsible stewardship and focusing on innovation, we will ensure that forestry remains a sustainable and essential part of Alberta's economy for generations to come.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister for the answer. Given that forest management is crucial in preventing and mitigating the risk of wildfires in Alberta and since forest management practices help reduce the likelihood of large, destructive wildfires and given that communities across Alberta are increasingly focused on managing forest resources to improve

resilience to wildfires, can the same minister elaborate on how supporting the forestry sector contributes to reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfires?

Mr. Loewen: Thanks again for that question. As Albertans we love our forests, but we don't want to love them to death. The reality is that decades of fire suppression and preventing selective harvesting created unnatural conditions where we now have huge areas of old, overgrown trees that can fuel catastrophic wildfires. Our forestry sector plays a critical role in reducing wildfire risks through selective harvesting, which helps reduce those fuel loads and restore forests to a healthier, more natural state. By supporting the forestry sector, we are not only protecting our communities but also ensuring our forests remain resilient and future generations can continue to enjoy them just as much as we do.

The Speaker: I am sure that all members are looking forward to joining the Leader of the Opposition, the Premier, and myself as we light the Legislature this evening, and I hope that you will join us there at 6:30.

AIMCo Governance

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, this government continuously demonstrates that they cannot be trusted. They can't be trusted to do what's best for Albertans when it comes to insurance, utility bills, tuition, and they're doing nothing to address the affordability crisis. Those are the facts. Now this government wants Albertans to trust them and their close insider friend Stephen Harper with the management of $170 billion of Albertans' assets and the future livelihood of over 350,000 Albertans. What guarantee can this minister give to Albertans that AIMCo will not be turned into a political entity but, rather, preserve it as an arm's-length organization?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's right in their mandate letter as an organization that there certainly would never be government interference. That's the parameters of the way it's constructed.

I would just remind the members opposite of this quote.

> Mr. Harper is a man of enormous integrity who has dedicated his entire life to public service and continues to do so. He's had an enormous impact, and we're very proud as Calgarians that we had a Prime Minister for a decade who hailed from this city. I understand he's thinking of offers in the private sector, which will be a switch for someone who has dedicated his whole life to the public service.

From your leader that's not here.

Member Loyola: Given that just one year ago this government passed legislation to remove salary caps for those serving on boards and commissions and given that many Albertans are having to supplement their wages with gig economy jobs just to make ends meet and given that Albertan wages aren't keeping up with inflation and many have not seen a raise in over five years, can the minister tell this House how much taxpayer money will go toward paying the new board of directors at AIMCo? Will their compensation be 10 times, 20 times, or even 30 times the minimum wage?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, it's fairly meagre when you serve on a board. The board of director does get a higher provision than the rest of the directors, but Mr. Harper has made it clear that he will be doing this pro bono on behalf of Albertans. He still wants to serve this province. He wants to serve this country. I think it's a great way to do it. I think it's tremendous leadership. It'll also speak to the fact that we want to, you know, control costs and show leadership from that executive level.

Member Loyola: Given that the UCP remains intent on taking control of Albertans' pensions and given that the appointment of Stephen Harper, one of the cosigners of the firewall letter advocating for an Alberta pension plan, makes their intentions even clearer, to the minister: will you commit today to keeping Albertans' retirement savings out of Stephen Harper's control by guaranteeing that the UCP will keep their hands off the CPP?

Mr. Horner: I almost don't want to dignify that with a response, Mr. Speaker. That was so ludicrous, what that member just said. We've made it absolutely clear. We passed legislation last fall as we have this conversation with Albertans about the idea of an APP. Certainly, it has nothing to do with Mr. Harper's credentials for the role that he's taken on on behalf of all Albertans, you know, Albertans at large, through the heritage fund and every Albertan that relies on their pension to be managed by AIMCo. I think it's a dangerous slope to even impute that it might.

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

Bill 24

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Although the members opposite have been lamenting, wailing, whining, gnashing their teeth regarding Bill 24, asking out loud, "Who could possibly think the bill of amendment rights were relevant?" I can tell you full well that the folks in God's country and across the rest of the province think they're very relevant. Property rights, freedom of choice, support of firearms ownership are important in the province, here in the strong and free. To the Minister of Justice: can you tell this Assembly the importance of the precise language used in these amendments, ensuring proper property protection to all Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice and the keeper of the Great Seal of Alberta.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to that hon. member. The Lougheed Conservatives had the foresight to enshrine Alberta's Bill of Rights in a piece of legislation. This government went even further. We strengthened Albertans' medical choices, property rights, and the right to legal firearm use. We also listened to Albertans, who asked us to make the limitations clause stronger and clearer. In response we made amendments to make sure that any government – whoever tries to place limits on Albertans, those limits must be proven to be demonstrably and proportionately justified and based on evidence.

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

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that responsible and legal firearm ownership is a priority of this government and given that during my time on the firearms task force we saw over 70,000 Albertans actively engaged in our town halls and our surveys and given the firearms community's reputation as one of Canada's most safety conscious, law-abiding, family-oriented groups and further given that the federal government has unfairly targeted law-abiding citizens by legally limiting ownership without evidence of even improving safety, can the same minister tell us how lawful Albertans will be treated fairly under Bill 24 and no further penalizing for being law-abiding citizens?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, on this side of the aisle we side with law-abiding gun owners; we side with informed approaches to firearms

policy that preserve safety and recognize the responsibility of gun ownership. We'll continue to oppose the federal government's ridiculous plans to confiscate firearms from law-abiding citizens. Law-abiding gun owners are not the problem. We'll continue to fight unfair restrictions on lawful firearm owners by the federal government. On this side of the House we stand with law-abiding firearm owners.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that personal freedom is a God-given right that all Albertans are born with in the province of strong and free and given that we have heard loud and clear that Albertans have voiced concerns when it comes to medical autonomy and further given that there are real concerns about coercion or the disclosure of personal medical information as a requirement for accessing services or gaining employment, can the same minister tell the Assembly how the amendments in Bill 24 will ensure medical choices remain fully in Albertans' hands?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member rightfully mentioned, amendments to the Bill of Rights will protect Albertans and reinforce the right of every single person in this province to make their own choices regarding medical treatments they receive. This includes ensuring that every individual in this province who has the capacity to do so will have the choice as to whether or not they receive any medical procedure. No Albertan should ever be subjected or pressured into accepting a medical treatment without their full consent. This government will continue to side with and step up for Albertans.

Arts and Culture Industry's Concerns about Artificial Intelligence

Member Ceci: To the minister of arts and culture. Stakeholders across the cultural sector are anxious about the advances of AI and what it means for their livelihoods. Last week major Canadian news outlets launched a lawsuit against ChatGPT for copyright breaches. Alberta's writers and publishers are also being impacted by AI, which will scrub the published works of writers without permission, payment, or attribution. What is the minister doing to ensure that Alberta's book publishers and authors are protected from the financial and copyright infringements of AI?

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

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is incredibly proud of our publishers, our writers, and our producers here in this province. I welcome any opportunity to talk with them, as I meet with them regularly already on concerns they have. If they have challenges or concerns about AI, I encourage them to reach out to me. I would be more than happy to speak with them. None of them have addressed this concern with me yet, but they know my door is always open.

Member Ceci: Given that Albertans have invested hundreds of millions to attract film and television to Alberta as a means of creating jobs, given that municipal governments and entrepreneurial Albertans have invested time and money to build film studios, recruit and train production crews and actors in film, what is the minister doing to protect the jobs of film and television workers as well as those Albertans who invested in the industry from advances in AI which could replace the work and livelihoods of cast and crew?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of arts and culture.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our book and magazine publishers, just like our film and TV producers in Alberta: it's an industry that's absolutely thriving. People continue to come to Alberta as one of the best places to film. I recently had an opportunity to tour many film sets here in Alberta and talk to the producers and directors. They're excited to be here.

Once again, they have not raised AI concerns with me. When and if they do, I'm happy to talk with them, along with our Minister of Technology and Innovation. We're happy to hear their concerns. Our film and television industry continues to boom.

Member Ceci: Given that the minister has not heard from anybody around AI, I want to stress that AI-generated artwork now showcases the rapid evolution through intricate details, vibrant colours, and diverse tones and given that the distinction between art produced by humans and AI has increasingly become blurred and given that humanity needs artists to help them learn and feel, to expose humanity's failings, and bring beauty and light to our lives, what action is the minister taking to ensure that Alberta's artists are not subjected to copyright infringements from AI and that art purchasers aren't being sold forgeries?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, what our government is doing to continue to support artists in this province is increasing funding to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. I continue to have round-tables and meetings with artists both on a one-on-one basis and a large-group basis. Our amazing new artist in residence Samantha Williams-Chapelsky does beautiful art that she does live that people can witness. Once again, my door is open. Our arts and culture community is thriving in this province, and I look forward to that continuing.

Agency Nursing

Ms Wright: Mr. Speaker, private staffing agencies are now one of the biggest expenditures in our so-called reformed health care system. Instead of hiring the nurses we need, this government is increasing spending on private agency nurses in Alberta from a half million during our NDP government's tenure to more than $156 million this year. The use of agency nurses through our health care system is a Band-Aid fix, not a long-term solution. To the minister: why is it that the UCP feels that it needs to spend millions more on temporary staff to fill those vacancies in our system instead of hiring nursing grads?

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

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite would know that during our last tenure the pandemic occurred, and we had to hire nurses because we had a great demand. Agency nursing right across the whole country went up from roughly about 750 million hours to over 1.5 million hours. We, in fact, here in Alberta are reducing our reliance on agency nursing. We would rather hire full-time nurses into full-time positions to provide that service on an ongoing basis, and AHS is tackling that right now.

Ms Wright: Given that a nurse working for one of those private staffing agencies told my office how frustrating it is to constantly be thrown into a health care situation without training or familiarity with the systems to provide a level of care her patients deserve and given that she is often being paid substantially more than her public-

sector nursing colleagues, with her agency making a profit over and above that, in the interest of patient care, recruitment, and retention of nurses, respect for a workforce currently in the middle of bargaining, will the minister explain their long-term plan for safe staffing and safe patient care?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, agency nurses do have support systems through the agencies that are employing them. We have a contractual obligation with them. I can actually further embellish in the fact that Alberta Health Services recently negotiated the contract so that it is actually more in keeping with what we used to pay prepandemic and not what we were paying through the pandemic, when all of the agency nurses were in high demand. We're looking to make sure that we use agency nursing judiciously in the province.

Ms Wright: Given that the Canadian Federation of Nurses recently released a research study that examined that high use of for-profit nursing agencies across the country, given that their report recommends phasing out private for-profit nursing staffing agencies and establishing an HR action plan to solve the nursing shortage and given that this government should spend public health care dollars in a public health care system, to the minister: why isn't this government investing in public health care and our nurses instead of for-profit private . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite should take yes for an answer because we are in fact investing in our nurses. We've hired over 4,000 more nurses just in the last year alone. Agency nursing reliance is going down. We still need agency nursing, particularly in rural, remote locations. We're finding that most of the nurses, over 70 per cent of agency nursing, are being used in the north zone. We're going to continue to reduce that. We want to hire full-time nurses into full-time positions. That is the best investment we can make for Albertans, and we're going to continue to do it.

The Speaker: The Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul has a question to ask.

Highway 28 Capital Plan

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Highway 20 is a vital artery for the Lakeland region which generates several billion dollars annually in royalties for the province's coffers. It supports one of Canada's largest air bases as it prepares for the F-35 program. The highway is also integral for the many oil field projects, including the $16.5 billion Pathways Alliance project. Given these factors, can the minister of transportation provide an update on the announced engineering and design work for highway 28 from Smoky Lake to Cold Lake?

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

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the member for that very important question and also for his advocacy on highway 28. He's been a fierce advocate, and I was happy to announce $5 million in design and engineering funding that was in last year's budget that is well under way that is going to look at twinning and adding passing lanes from Smoky Lake to Cold Lake. It's all part and part to our resource revenue map that we're looking at, the billions of dollars of royalties that come into this province. It doesn't come from Edmonton and Calgary and the cities. It comes from rural Alberta, and that's why we're so concentrated on investing in rural Alberta.

2:40

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

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that a section of highway 28 passes through Bonnyville and has a serious safety concern, highlighted by the recent, tragic pedestrian fatality of a senior that deeply impacted my community, and further given that I was grateful that the minister listened to the comments and concerns of the Bonnyville council and then committed to addressing safety improvements for this stretch of roadway, can the minister please provide an update on the progress of the critical safety measures for this highway?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of transportation.

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. From Smoky Lake to Bonnyville we'll actually see land purchases and utility moves starting next year, and on that stretch there'll be 12 intersection improvements, a two-lane roundabout at highway 855, constructing two new safety rest areas and upgrading an additional one, constructing five new passing lanes, and improving road curvatures. This is all part and parcel to make sure that people that live in that area can get home safely and also we can move truck traffic in a safe manner in that very important road.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that highway 28 is extremely critical for my constituents, serving a vital road for commuting and the movement of goods, and further given that the narrow, two-lane section between Bonnyville and Cold Lake sees over 12,000 vehicles per day, including many large oil field trucks, potentially creating dangerous and overcrowded conditions, can the minister provide an update on the twinning plans announced in 2023 from this critical stretch of highway 28?

Mr. Dreeshen: Mr. Speaker, the twinning from Bonnyville to Cold Lake has 14 intersection improvements, constructing three new safety rest areas, 10 new passing lanes, improving five road curvatures, and, actually, we'll have four kilometres of additional twinning from outside of Bonnyville to Cold Lake. That design work is well under way, and it's our best hope that construction will be completed in the next two to three years because that's such an important stretch of highway. Again, I'd like to thank the member for his fierce advocacy to get this project across the finish line.

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.

The Official Opposition Leader, I believe.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Guests.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a request for unanimous consent. That's a little unorthodox in the middle of the Routine, but in light of this afternoon I will put the question to the Assembly.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests
(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West, followed by the minister of agriculture.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to everyone here in the Assembly for this opportunity to introduce Zachary Weeks and Cris Miana. Zach is a well-known advocate for persons with disabilities here in Edmonton and right across the province. He's a constituent of mine, and I dare say he's a good friend of mine as well. If everyone could please give them warm greetings here in the Legislature today.

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of agriculture.

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to have the opportunity to introduce to you and through you guests from my constituency who do incredible work protecting our community. I'd like to introduce members from the Okotoks Firefighters Association: President Travis Wray, Joshua Barry, Ryan Kaiser, and Michael Pytyck. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there other introductions? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today through you to introduce to you and bring warm greetings from Ashley Mulders, who is more than just a miscellaneous queer, who has been here for every part of debate on trans rights in this House. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Bills

Bill 213
Cancer Care Delivery Standards Act

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 213, Cancer Care Delivery Standards Act.

This bill would establish standardized, transparent, and publicly funded and administered cancer care delivery in a timely manner. At this time Albertans are waiting three to four times longer than the recommended wait times; 90 per cent of Alberta cancer patients are waiting 13-plus weeks to see a radiation oncologist. This is unacceptable, and I strongly encourage all members of this House to vote in support of Bill 213.

[Motion carried; Bill 213 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier has a tabling.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings stemming from my remarks yesterday on Government Motion 53. I have the requisite number of copies of all of them. I have 10, so I would ask for your indulgence as I introduce them.

I'll start with the report from Deloitte on the federal government's so-called emissions cap and how it will bring about a $26 billion cut to Canada's overall GDP in 2035.

I have a report from the Conference Board of Canada that states the federal government's so-called emissions cap will result in 150,000 jobs lost in the production cap of at least 1 million barrels per day.

Then I have an article by Meghan Potkins from the November 6 *Financial Post* that quotes Eric Nuttall calling the cap "economic idiocy" and quotes Michael Belenkie saying that Canada is the only country willing to self-immolate.

Next is a statement from the Business Council of Canada which is headlined Emissions Cap Will Make Canadians Poorer and Harm Energy Ties with the U.S.

Next is a statement from the Business Council of Alberta, who says the emissions cap will cap Canadian prosperity.

Next is the media release from the Montreal Economic Institute titled Emissions Cap: Many Jobs Lost for Very Few Gains.

Next is a statement from the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers which says the cap will reduce jobs and lower production exports, GDP, and revenues.

Next is a statement from the Canadian Association of Energy Contractors which says: "The Trudeau government does not care about Canadian blue-collar, middle-class energy workers."

Next is a statement from the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters that says the cap: threatens Canada's energy, trade, economic interests, and national unity.

Next is from Canada Powered by Women which highlights the cap would exacerbate Canada's productivity problem and negatively impact the country's GDP and Canadians' quality of life.

Finally, I have a Chris Varcoe article from the November 26 *Calgary Herald* about the highest employment in the sector in nearly a decade. I'll add that the cap would wipe many of them out.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Wright: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I've got three tablings today. One is a political cartoon talking about the disaster at the border and how Minister Bill Blair in Ottawa cut $390 million from their budget over two years.

Another one is an article highlighting a very similar sentiment talking about the $264.9 million being slashed in '21 and $125 million being slashed in '22.

And the last one is a tweet from X where the missing-in-action Leader of the Opposition called one of his female members his driver.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a number of e-mails. These e-mails are from Melanie from Grande Prairie, Alaina from Calgary, Maeryn from Strathcona-Sherwood Park, and Maria from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. These are just many of the thousands of e-mails our offices have received calling on this UCP government and this Premier to kill the egregious antitrans legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the day when on the Order Paper we have the readings of Bill 26, Bill 27, and Bill 29, I have letters from constituents of Sherwood Park that want the Premier to reconsider. This legislation is horrible, terrible, and poisonous to Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by Calgary-Varsity.

Member Eremenko: I'd like to table five copies of an article written by Leah Hamilton and Corinne Mason, two profs at MRU. The article is called In Alberta Queer Families Are Not Okay, and I urge all members to read it.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a collection of many e-mails received demanding the UCP implement its promised physician compensation model that was agreed to with Alberta doctors over a year ago.

2:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by Calgary-Edgemont.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling a statement from the Canadian Medical Association titled Canadian Medical Association Strongly Opposes Government Efforts to Restrict Access to Care.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Edgemont, followed by Calgary-Foothills.

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Dylan, for your heartfelt letter. You are a Calgary-Edgemont resident sharing your heartfelt journey of personal experience of social transitioning and then your medical journey working with your doctor. I encourage all members to read this letter asking us to do our jobs and leave the trans community alone and vote no today to bills 26, 27, and 29.

Mr. Ellingson: I rise to table five requisite copies of Alberta's Disappearing Advantage, which, among other things, talks about how Albertans are facing a decline in real wages and that we're losing our advantage in wages across the country.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Protected Areas has three tablings.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do have three articles to table in this House, with important quotes from industry leaders on the oil and gas production cap. The first is from the Canadian Chamber of Commerce talking about competitiveness for industry and the negative impacts that this cap would have.

The second is an article on CBC, with quotes from Kendall Dilling, president of Pathways Alliance, who says that this would result in a decrease in Canadian production, that would have no impact on global demand and emissions reductions.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, I will be tabling five copies in the House of a statement from Nancy Dodds, mayor of Drayton Valley, who talks about this cap crushing our province and our community; "we can't go through that again," that being policies like we saw under the NDP.

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

Member Batten: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a recent article, just from a couple of months ago, reporting that Indigenous children are 17 times more likely to be apprehended in Alberta, which, of course, strongly shows the failure of this government to care for children in care.

The Speaker: Are there other tablings?

Hon. members, that brings us to points of order, of which there were none, and a gold star to everyone.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

The Speaker: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader has risen.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to seek unanimous consent of the Assembly to move to one-minute bells for the remainder of the afternoon sitting, including the first bells at Committee of the Whole.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 26
Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2)

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

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

The Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2), would preserve choice for minors, support continued efforts to refocus the health care system, and protect the rights of 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. Our province is growing, and this bill responds to the changing needs of Albertans. For too long Albertans have faced a health care system that is overburdened, hard to navigate, and slow to address their needs. That's why our government has been working to refocus the health care system. We recognize that long wait times in overwhelmed emergency rooms are unacceptable. Our vision for the future of health care is that the province is rooted in accountability and includes four provincial health agencies working together to ensure Albertans have access to the care they need when and where they need it.

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, acute care Alberta.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

These changes would ensure that 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. Bill 26 represents the next step in ensuring that we build a system that works for Albertans without disrupting the services they rely on.

Through the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2) 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 the COVID-19 pandemic.

Albertans know that our government is committed to safeguarding individuals' rights. However, we recognize that there are times when public health measures must be taken to keep our communities safe.

Introducing a preamble to the Public Health Act and clarifying what constitutes a public health emergency would ensure the rights of Albertans are protected and that public health measures are only taken when needed. Similarly, including an amended definition of a public health emergency would ensure we find the right balance and respond appropriately to situations that may arise in the future. These amendments address recommendation 3.2 and recommendation 7.4 from the panel's report.

Bill 26 also includes a proposed administrative amendment to the Health Information Act that would designate the Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services as a custodian, enabling that ministry to better support Albertans and improve health services planning and delivery. The amendment would also support the transition of continuing care to the Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services.

Finally, amendments to the Health Professions Act would prohibit regulated health professionals from performing sex

reassignment surgeries on minors and would also 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. As research on the risks and benefits of treatments for gender dysphoria in minors is limited, we are imposing restraint to ensure future choices are preserved before minors make potentially permanent, life-altering decisions.

Definitions that do not currently exist in the legislation would also be added to provide clarity on its scope. This would include definitions for gender dysphoria, gender incongruence, and minor. 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. As health care professions are regulated by self-governing regulatory bodies or colleges under the Health Professions Act, the various colleges would be responsible for enforcing the prohibitions through their unprofessional conduct discipline processes.

Minors who identify as transgender often grapple with complex feelings and emotions, and these policies would preserve choice so that they can make adult decisions in the future when they're adults. Madam Speaker, I want to reaffirm our government's commitment to providing transgender youth and their families with support, resources, and appropriate services.

The Health Statutes Amendment Act reflects our government's vision for the future of health care in the province. The proposed amendments enable our government to continue building a system that prioritizes patients, protects vulnerable populations, and empowers health care workers to deliver world-class services. Madam Speaker, I now read this statute one more time.

I rise for moving third reading of Bill 26, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2).

The Deputy Speaker: Are there members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I want to begin by referencing the tabling I did just a few minutes ago titled CMA strongly opposes government efforts to restrict access to care.

It is not every day that all sections within the CMA agree on something, but I will say that the sections that are all present in the Canadian Medical Association believe that what the government is doing here in terms of medicine and in terms of their ability to dictate what types of procedures will be available to some Canadians here in the province of Alberta, the CMA was united in this statement. One of the sentences I'm going to read out is: "Canadians have a right to make personal choices about their health with the support of their families, the guidance of licensed, regulated health professionals, and free from political interference."

Yesterday I had the pleasure of meeting with the president of the CMA, who is a family doctor and a female health specialist and a hospitalist. When we were asking about some specific situation, she said: I don't know; that's not my expertise.

3:00

I will say, Madam Speaker, through you to all members of the Assembly and especially to the Minister of Health, that it is not government's expertise what types of procedures should be offered to patients. Let me give an example. When I was minister, a request came across my desk for a specific and rare treatment to be done for a patient here in the province of Alberta. It was very rare, which is one of the reasons why it hadn't been approved through prior stages with experts, but I, in the legislation, had the authority to make the decision to make an exception.

I weighed on it for about a day, and then I thought: I'm not going to be the one who denies this child a chance at having this because I don't have the expertise to say yes or no. What I did is that I delegated that authority to people who actually did have the expertise, a medical panel. I am very grateful that I did – at that time, I did approve that one – to make sure we could come up with a new process that would have the experts actually making these decisions, for multiple reasons, including that I didn't want it to live on my conscience, Madam Speaker. Also, I did not know the next thing that would be coming up that I might not be qualified to make that decision on again. That's exactly what the government has decided to do. They've decided to weigh in on the patient and medical expertise and say that the government knows better.

We tried to make this bad bill a little less bad by calling the government on their testimony that they believe in parental choice, by putting in an amendment that if parents consented with a child, with the health professionals to provide hormone blockers, puberty-delaying medication, the government shouldn't intervene and say that it's wrong. But not a single member of the government spoke to the amendment, and then they voted it down, making it very clear that this isn't about parental rights. This is about the current Premier and some of those closest to her and her cabinet playing political games that will have potentially deadly consequences for teens in our province. If this really was about parental choice, they would allow parents to consent to hormone blockers, as they do today.

One of the consequences of them saying that this will come into effect in the new year is that I've had parents of young Albertans who will be impeded from the ability to delay puberty if they don't get the medication now. Many who are already without family doctors are rushing to try to find somebody so that their children don't have to feel powerless at a time when many youth often do feel powerless and excluded, trying to find some way to give a little bit of control and certainty back to these young people. That's not right, Madam Speaker. They might never feel like they needed to be on puberty blockers, but because of the government putting in these timelines, they feel like they have to rush to make a medical decision in a very, very tight timeline, now less than a month.

The CMA letter goes on to say that this approach "restricts the most appropriate care options for some patients [and] has the potential to cause permanent harm" and "we [also] know that transgender youth have higher rates of mental health issues, including suicidal tendencies, due to stigma that they face." The government has only piled on with that stigma through the politicization of these young people and, specifically, this legislation.

I'm going to table an amendment at this point, and then I will continue on with my remarks, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment HA1.

Hon. member, please proceed.

Ms Hoffman: I'm introducing a hoist amendment on behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition and our House leader, stating that Bill 26 be amended by deleting the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 26, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2), be not now read a third time but that it be read a third time this day six months [from now]."

With that reasoning, I want to say what I think would be helpful for the government to do between now and six months from now. I think the government needs to seriously reflect on whether or not

they actually have the competencies to be able to make these decisions. I think that they should do further consultation with trans youth and their families to make sure that they hear first-hand from the people that this bill would directly impact today.

I also believe that the government should take those next six months to determine what exactly their highest priority should be. Earlier today I heard the member who represents Smoky Lake talking about the importance of highway 28. Sure; it is very important. And one of the reasons why it's even more important today is because their emergency department is going to be closed tonight. Just in the last week Smoky Lake, Spirit River, Hinton, Lac La Biche, Fairview, and Edson: no emergency department coverage, especially in the evenings.

It's ridiculous, Madam Speaker, that the government chooses, in an opportunity when they can address health care in this House, to not talk about health care consequences that are happening in these communities because they failed to act to address the doctor shortage or the extreme wait times or the lack of access to rural health care in general but instead chose to take up legislative time to come into this place and talk about infringing on the rights of parents, children, and medical professionals to provide the best care possible.

I said earlier that it's not just about a doctor knowing what is best care. There are experts and specialists who work with these youth and their families to make sure that they know all of the options that are available to them and to their families.

I also want to talk about a constituent of mine who's a speech pathologist who works a lot of the time with adults who need to go through speech therapy because their voices have changed because they are through puberty and they are of a different gender than the one assigned to them at birth. This will only make their work more difficult because we'll have more young people needing to access this type of medical care because they didn't have the opportunity to delay puberty and, when they are an adult, make the decision about whether or not they change their gender identity or sex or at any point along the way forcing them to go through puberty.

I don't know about you, Madam Speaker, but even the government's promise that there will be an exception allowed for those who are 16 or 17 who have been emancipated minors – I was long through puberty by 16. That wouldn't have even, if I needed to access that medication, been of help to me and, I doubt, to many other people who were assigned their sex as female at birth.

The last couple of things I want to touch on: I think that it's fair for us to say six months from now and that this does give the government a chance, if they actually do find compelling evidence and experts to stand up with them, to act on this six months from now. But if they don't, I would recommend that maybe they update the nurse practitioner legislation that impedes them from being able to sign forms for those needing to access AISH. Again, something that the government could do through legislation in this House: instead of making health care harder to get for young people, making it easier for people who are severely handicapped to be able to get on to AISH and get their services met for them.

Also, I think the fact that the ministerial order will also talk about specific prescriptions – again, if you ask anyone, "Who knows best about health care?" they might say, "My doctor," or they might say, "My nurse." They won't say, "The Member for Red Deer-North," or any other member of the House, probably. Well, maybe the neurologist for Calgary-Varsity, but other than that I doubt many people would say that the person who knows my health care story the best and who'd be the best at making decisions for it with me is an MLA.

The minister just talked about young people having complex feelings and emotions. I will tell you what is not complex: many young people have reached out to us, thousands of letters, saying that they feel targeted by this government and they don't feel respected. So if you actually want to address the fact that a lot of young people have insecurities, a variety of emotional experiences, I would say that allowing them to work with health professionals and their parents and other loved ones to help guide their health journey would be something that would alleviate a lot of stress and anxiety for many young people.

I'm sure many of my colleagues have more to say on this, so with that I will cede my time and urge my colleagues to vote yes on this hoist amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Al-Guneid: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I do support this hoist because I do believe that Bill 26 and the government's trifecta of antitrans policies is a classic and cynical distraction from the government's failure to find more family doctors for Albertans and to reduce ER wait times.

3:10

There are major consequences for this bill that I do not think the UCP government fully understands. This bill actually brings flashbacks to me. I've shared a few times now in this House that I grew up in Yemen. I was privileged to have had a beautiful and exceptional childhood, Madam Speaker. I remember that when I was in grade 4, I had a classmate who was sweet and friendly. He always played with us girls and didn't play as much with the boys. Let's call him Ilya. I played with Ilya. Even as a kid I sensed that he was different.

One day Ilya's dad came unannounced to the classroom to meet with the teacher. The teacher stepped out and left the classroom's door open. Ilya was called to come and see his dad and the teacher. As Ilya was walking out, he accidentally dropped a doll. I didn't realize that he had brought a doll to that classroom. Apparently, neither did his father. A few minutes later we heard Ilya's dad yelling at his kid. He also slapped his kid on the face right outside of our classroom. The teacher quickly shut the door so we wouldn't hear what was happening outside. That was the last time I saw Ilya. I really hope Ilya is safe and okay today.

Madam Speaker, I want to remind the Assembly that in some countries in this world members of the queer and LGBTQ2S community face being disowned by their families. In some countries members of this community are threatened with the death penalty for merely existing. I chose to immigrate to Canada because of the freedoms and the rights protected by our Constitution and by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, because our Constitution protects everyone, including minorities, regardless of their orientation and their background.

I arrived here in Canada as a 17-year-old. I came on my own to start university just a few days before the tragic event of 9/11. As an Arab I was a member of a community that understood what it meant to live in fear because our rights and freedoms were under threat. I knew then what I know now: when the rights and freedoms of some are under threat, it weakens the rights and freedoms of all of us. These bills take away rights. These bills normalize othering and enshrine it into law. This is why I support this hoist.

The rhetoric around this bill demonstrates systemic othering and harms toward a very small minority. Statistics Canada collected data on gender for the first time in 2021. The government should look at the numbers before coming up with this heavy-handed health legislation. In Canada 1 in 300 people aged 15 or older are transgender or nonbinary. That is .33 per cent. I must ask: what is the UCP trying to solve here? This is a tiny and vulnerable population, and if you look at this data from an intersectional and cultural lens, it will be an even

smaller and more vulnerable group. In some households these bills will be a matter of life and death for kids, Madam Speaker.

This bill is a massive government overreach. The UCP has shown that they love big government interventions such as firing the AIMCo board. The *New York Times* called this purge a Soviet-style pension purge, by the way. Other UCP big government interventions include imposing the renewables moratorium or flirting with the idea of nationalizing the electricity sector or this bill that literally interferes between parents, their children, and their doctors. It restricts the freedoms that parents currently have.

It is ironic, Madam Speaker, because the Minister of Justice enlightened us with his op-ed titled Alberta Needs a Modern Bill of Rights to Prevent Government Overreach. It is fascinating how the minister is selective about who gets rights and who doesn't.

Madam Speaker, I recently saw my family doctor for my seven-year-old child and his foot injury. I reflected at the examination room, and I was like: thank goodness the government isn't infringing on the autonomy of my family at this doctor's visit, deciding how to treat my child's foot and which health care my kid can access.

Madam Speaker, I am certain that no member – no member – in this Assembly wakes up every morning wanting to harm children. I am certain of that. At the same time, the members opposite need to understand the consequences of this bill and other bills, the harm and the othering that this government will be causing by singling out vulnerable kids.

As a mother and a parent I want my children to be safe. I equally want all children of all backgrounds, ethnicities, and orientations to be safe, loved, receiving the care and the health care they need whenever they need it. Madam Speaker, as a parent, of course, I want to be involved and aware of everything my kid does. You bet I want to. Of course parents love their kids and want the best for them. No one is debating this. The question is: how does the government ensure that all children remain safe and well taken care of, especially the .33 per cent? That's the question.

A constituent of mine, Dr. Paul Meunier, a sessional instructor of gender and sexuality studies at the University of Calgary, shared with me the state of the students in his classrooms as they see these bills as attacks on human rights. I quote here: in some of my recent classes I've had visibly distressed students; emotions have been high, and one of my trans, nonbinary students recently cried openly in class, wondering if all our human rights efforts are just pointless now. End quote.

Dr. Meunier asks an important question: why is it so important for the Premier to single out, shape new rules and regulations around, and unnecessarily target a small minority? It is an important question, Madam Speaker. We're talking about .33 per cent of Canada's population. History has shown us how the mistreatment of minorities starts with taking away rights. It starts with othering, increased rhetoric, targeting, taking away rights of minorities, and, eventually, dehumanizing. History has shown us this pattern with other groups: women, people with disabilities, the Roma, the Palestinians, the Blacks, the Jews, and the Arabs post 9/11. This is a dangerous and a typical pattern. I wonder which minority group is next.

Madam Speaker, every time I hear trans anything, I know this UCP government is trying to distract Albertans from the doctor shortage, the ER wait times, and the lack of access to rural health care and the mismanagement of our economy, all while Albertans feel the brunt of an affordability crisis. This is why this bill needs to be scrapped. I support this hoist.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to this hoist amendment this afternoon, a very rare measure taken very seriously in this House by an opposition that brings it forward not without serious consideration of the consequences and the meaning of it.

A hoist amendment, as we all know in this House, is intended to make sure the legislation is not now read a third time and is, six months from now, reconsidered once the government has had an opportunity to perhaps rethink the consequences of this legislation. Of course, we as an opposition, Madam Speaker, bring forward this hoist amendment because we feel that this bill is so detrimental to the individuals it targets that nothing less than removal from the Order Paper is warranted.

3:20

I think today, Madam Speaker, of course, following my hon. colleague, that I tend to take things to a personal level as well. I think today of a trans woman who is in my office who is a practicum student, a social work student, who I know feels targeted by the government that is in power in this province, targeted because she wonders maybe who's next but also because she feels that she's been violated in terms of her rights to access health care that she needs to finalize the transition that she deserves to have the right to do. I cannot but help think about Brooke every moment that this House debates this piece of legislation and what she feels when she looks at a piece of legislation like this and wonders why – why in the world – the government would target her in such a way, denying her the same health care procedures that anybody else could get, but for her being a trans woman, she is denied these same health care procedures. In this world today I cannot give an answer to Brooke as to why indeed a government would do such a thing. It's reprehensible, in my view.

That's why we are determined to do everything we can to make sure that this legislation never sees the light of day, notwithstanding the government's desire to make it a priority in the light of an economic situation where the affordability crisis affects everybody, where students are packed in classrooms, where we have a situation where underpaid EAs are going, potentially, on strike across the province, where doctors are unavailable in so many communities. This is the priority of the government, which has devoted roughly 25 per cent of its legislative time this session to targeting trans youth, to prohibit them from accessing surgeries and procedures and health care which they would not deny to anybody else, except for them being trans. This is a government, Madam Speaker, that has lost its fundamental responsibility to protect people, not to go after them and target them and make them feel perhaps they want to leave the province or feel they have to leave the province in order to protect the sanctity of their own health care.

Now, I think today also of Austin Dunphy, a gay man that I've mentioned before in this House, who was a student in high school with me at Queen Elizabeth in the 1970s. Austin was ostracized, and more so than that; he was beat up numerous times in the three years that he attended the high school that I attended, simply because he was gay. You'd think, Madam Speaker, that after the time frame that's passed – it's 50 years since that time – we would maybe have made some advances and maintained those advances to protect the rights of gay, lesbian, LGBTQ2S-plus, trans people. But no, that's not what's happening in this province. We're going backwards.

One would be right to question what decade we're in in this province when it comes to social engineering legislation provided by this government. Are we in the '30s? Are we in the 1950s? It makes one question exactly what the mindset of this government is.

We'd have thought that with the Delwin Vriend case that we saw during the Klein era, where a professor at the King's college, then

called, was denied employment because of his being gay – and, of course, Delwin Vriend took the province to court and won the right not to be denied employment because of his homosexuality. That's something that we heralded as a very major victory in this province, and it was widely supported in this province. It's something we're proud of doing. Yet this government has forgotten about those strides forward, Madam Speaker, and has chosen instead to move us backwards into the Dark Ages of antitrans and homophobic attitudes and given power and emboldenment to those people who would foment that hate against individuals whose sexuality is other than the heterosexual concept that this government seems to accept as the only norm. Quote, unquote.

So, yes, "Who's next?" is the question that gay and trans people in this province will ask. This government is not shy about targeting individuals if they think it will gain them a seat or two here or there in the next election and perhaps carve out a win in 2027. That's the calculation that this government makes, Madam Speaker. It's a crass calculation, and it's one not rooted in protecting individuals and human beings. It's one that is rooted in seriously disagreeing with and disavowing the reality that exists in human populations the world over that a certain percentage of the population, no matter where you happen to be in the world, are either gay, they're trans, or they're lesbian. It's a natural thing, yet this government seems to forget about that and rails against it.

I have another individual in my office who's worked part-time, who comes from Somalia. He told me about an evening where he had gone back to Somalia – his family is from Somalia – and was there on a visit, and there was a big excitement in the village, and the crowd was getting ready to go to a main event in the square. To his horror, he learned that what was happening in the village square was the execution of a gay man, and the village was excited about it. I'm wondering, Madam Speaker: how far off from that type of reprehensible behaviour are we when we go down this road that this government is willing to take? [interjections] I'm wondering.

Mr. Williams: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

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

Point of Order
Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Williams: Madam Speaker, I rise on 23(j). This is language certain to create disorder in the House, where the member opposite, in a civil debate, which is an important debate for us to have, who is making important points that I believe he has every right and responsibility to do to represent his constituents, has now veered into attacks on whether or not government is going to be assassinating or stringing up individuals. It is ludicrous. It is deeply offensive to any member of this House that this is suggested, that a government would do it. No one is suggesting this, and we ask members opposite to please restrain themselves and stay to plausible and civil debate, because we think it is important that we have that in this Chamber on an important piece of legislation. It demeans the entire debate when we find hyperbolic language whose purpose is solely to inflame.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Now, none of us have the Blues, but I don't believe that this is a point of order because this member did not make any allegations even against the government as a whole, let alone any specific member. What I heard the member say is: how far are we, broadly, collectively, from this kind of behaviour if the government continues down this road? He's speaking of the legislation the government is bringing forward. He did not make any allegations about any government member or even the government collectively. He merely reflects on the direction the government is going and how that could more broadly affect us as a society. So I do not believe that this is a point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, thank you for your comments on this matter.

I think that while the hon. member who was speaking certainly didn't direct his comments toward an individual member in particular, the comments themselves were not particularly helpful for decorum in this Chamber; actually, most certainly were not helpful for decorum in this Chamber. While I won't find this to be a point of order, I find this to be a great opportunity for the hon. member to bring back decorum in this House and continue with the cautions given from myself for his remarks.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, please continue.

Debate Continued

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I shall continue and be mindful of your comments.

I wanted to close my comments, Madam Speaker, by saying that this legislation, that we are now seeking to hoist and not be read now but be six months from now reconsidered after the government has had an opportunity to visit the arguments we're bringing forward this afternoon as legislators in opposition, being brought forward to us by constituents, would embolden the bigots and the antitrans hate that we see in this province. We've already seen efforts, political efforts to remove rainbow crosswalks, to prohibit the ability of trans individuals to access the health care they need. What's next is the question in the minds of many, Madam Speaker.

With that I will cede my time to others who may wish to comment on the bill.

3:30

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

Ms Wright: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today as I speak, obviously in support of this hoist amendment, with a great deal of knowledge that on occasion it is indeed a good thing to take a step back and to really reflect and to really review what it is that you are about to do, I'm speaking primarily as a mom and as a grandmother and, most particularly, as a teacher. Having had 24 years' worth of teaching, I can't tell you how many kids came through my classrooms all of those years. Some of those kids, Madam Speaker, are the kids that we are talking about in this bill and, in fact, in this suite of bills.

This is not, indeed, a bill that will be helpful to kids, and it certainly will not protect them. This suite of bills, including bills 27 and 29, are all about being harmful to an incredibly vulnerable group of kids. As a result of that, I am baffled. I am dumbfounded as to why a government is making this a priority. I truly, truly don't understand. I hearken back to conversations I had with my parents many, many years ago when something was happening in the world and I was a wee bit confused about it. I would often ask that question: why are they doing this now? That's the question I need to ask this government. Why are you doing this now? Why are you picking on an incredibly vulnerable group of kids? Why are you doing this to this group of children?

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, please direct your comments to me and through me, not to "you" or any particular member.

Ms Wright: Yes. Sorry, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Wright: To you, if I may, I am baffled as to the reasons why this bill is before us. Certainly, in my view it's a bill that simply sets out to harm folks rather than to help them in any way, shape, or form. This is a bill that is dangerous, and this is a bill that I believe will ensure that lives will be lost in the future, lives that now hold purpose and that hold value and lives that we should be lifting up rather than doing the opposite.

Not only that, of course, this is a bill that infringes upon a person's rights to their own body, to their own bodily autonomy, to their ability to say "yes," to consent to procedures, particularly when, Madam Speaker, their parents are right there with them and very, very supportive of them. Again, this is a bill that will harm. This is a bill that will damage. This is not a bill that is about lifting up folks.

This is a bill that denies access to crucial, gender-affirming care. When I think about my own grandchildren and their ability right now to get the care that they need, no matter what care that might be, I do wonder why in this bill this particular group of vulnerable kids is not going to be able to have the same access as my four-year-old grandchild or my 10-year-old grandchild or my other four-year-old grandchild or the extra 12-year-old grandchild.

Trans rights are human rights, Madam Speaker, and good governance means upholding and protecting all human rights, not just a select few. That is what this government should be in the business of. It should be in the business of upholding every single person's human rights, not just a smaller group of them.

One of the things that we know is that there will be an impact. There already is an impact. Colleagues have spoken of the impacts that they have already experienced just simply by having this conversation in public. We know that the very act of having this conversation is already harming folks from the trans and gender-diverse community. For a group of young people, particularly, who are already susceptible to this amount of harm, again, I am baffled and dumbfounded as to why this government is going to continue, Madam Speaker, to perpetuate this harm.

We should, I believe, be taking some example from our neighbours down to the south, where we know that there are many states out there who already have an act of very similar legislation. There is already a wealth of data that's come out of that legislation. Twenty states to the south of us have professional or civil penalties for providing gender-affirming care to minors, and for physicians that means that they are in danger of losing their licence just because they're providing care to people who need and deserve that care.

Fifteen states have introduced bills that restrict access to gender-affirming care for youth. Some of those bills include provisions that criminalize health professionals, penalize parents, and in a place where insurance coverage does indeed make the difference between simply a basic form of health care or no health care at all, people are finding that they are unable to procure the insurance coverage that they need for even just basic health care.

[The Speaker in the chair]

All of this together, Mr. Speaker, has resulted in young people and their families having to travel out of state for the care that they deserve. They're having to move their homes, they're having to change jobs, communities, and states, all in an effort to find a safe haven for themselves, for their children, for the people that they care about. This is where the U.S. is right now, and this, I am concerned, is where we might be headed, and we should not be. This should not be something that we are okay with. We should be taking lessons from our neighbours to the south, from the U.S., and that is why this amendment, this hoist amendment, is incredibly important for us to consider.

I want to take a moment just to describe a story of a woman. She's a very, very young person who from a very, very young age knew that she was different. This comes from NPR health news. It's about a young woman called Veronica. In the health news this very, very brave young woman tells her story, tells her coming out story, on her own terms, I might add. She was comfortable enough in the beginning to tell a few friends, and about a year and a half later she finally told her parents. She was extraordinarily lucky, Mr. Speaker. She had very, very supportive parents. Those parents knew that she was simply their kid. In particular, her mom knew that she just wanted to support her kid, just like all parents want just to support their kids.

She was able to get the care that she required, that gender-affirming care that she needed, at first, but then the state that she was living in, Iowa, decided to take a pause. That's very similar to what it is we're doing here, taking a pause. As a result of that pause in gender-affirming care, it didn't really work out for Veronica. She was at the point where she was taking puberty blockers, and because of that pause it meant that she was going to have to stop those blockers, which of course would mean bodily changes like her voice deepening, the growth of an Adam's apple, facial hair, shoulder broadening, and more. While some might be changed later with surgery, that's incredibly invasive surgery when to take some puberty blockers would have solved much of that question.

What she and her family do now, Mr. Speaker, is that they drive hours away to another state that can provide that safe haven for both herself and her family. Kids in the United States shouldn't have to travel away from home to get the health care that they deserve, and neither should the kids that I know that are already thinking about what it is that they're going to do once this legislation is passed. That is one of the reasons why we need to be really reconsidering what it is that we are doing here today.

As a mom, as a grandma, I am asking that every single person in this House think about those kids in your life. What kind of a future do you want for them? I urge everyone in this House to vote in favour in support of the hoist amendment.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on amendment HA1, are there others wishing to join in the debate?

Seeing none.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment HA1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:39 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Amery	Johnson	Schow

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

Totals:	For – 35	Against – 47

[Motion on amendment HA1 lost]

The Speaker: It being a hoist motion, I am required to put before the Assembly all necessary questions to dispose of third reading of Bill 26, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2).

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:45 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

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

Totals:	For – 47	Against – 35

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a third time]

The Speaker: In 30 seconds or less we will call the hon. Minister of Education.

3:50

Bill 27
Education Amendment Act, 2024

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education has the call.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to move third reading of Bill 27, the Education Amendment Act, 2024.

Of course, as members note, the act addresses a few key pieces, so I want to touch on a few of those elements. I think some members in debate have gotten a little lost about what the bill is actually about and what it's seeking to do, so I'll cover those very briefly. I'd like to take the opportunity as well just to address some of the comments, questions, and concerns that I've heard about different aspects of the bill throughout the course of debate that we've been having on the bill over the past few weeks.

First and foremost, the bill will make a number of amendments that are implementing recommendations from the Public Health Emergencies Governance Review Panel. Quite a mouthful there. Of course, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic we commissioned the review panel to explore government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In their analysis the panel and its members explored how the education system responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and, naturally, made a number of recommendations for government's consideration to strengthen learning and prevent disruptions to learning.

I think this is an aspect that all members in the Assembly can agree on, which is that the COVID-19 pandemic caused some significant disruption to student learning. The lack of in-person learning, the dramatic shift to online learning, and loss of in-person supports, social activities, and other consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic caused many students to see disruptions in their academic performance, their social abilities, and other areas. I think it's important that we pay particular attention to how these students' lives were disrupted as a result of the pandemic.

Of course, we've taken a number of measures since that time to help address learning loss attributed to COVID-19. That led to the introduction of literacy and numeracy screeners in '23 for select grades and additional funding that our government made available to our school divisions to help them hire additional staff, educational assistants, speech language pathologists, and other professionals so that we can ensure that those students who face disruption are able to perform at grade level. That was a key priority, I know, of the minister of the time and is something, of course, that we continue to keep a close eye on to make sure that those students are progressing in a normal trajectory and are coping with learning loss from the pandemic.

Learning from our past experience, Bill 27 makes a number of amendments and modifications to the Education Act. Primarily, it helps to highlight the importance of education in a public health emergency and seeks to promote access and strengthen access to in-person learning even during a public health emergency. It also establishes a new right to education for students during a public health emergency, and it also ensures that parents are notified and provide their consent to health measures that a school authority or a school board might put in place during a public health emergency.

So the bill addresses those recommendations and, of course, also makes a number of other amendments. The other amendments that the bill makes are broadly in the areas of human sexuality, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

First and foremost, the bill amends the Education Act to change the opt-out element for programs and studies that deal with human sexuality to an opt-in requirement. Now, again, for clarity and context

current practice in Alberta and the current legislation do provide parents with the ability to opt their child out of human sexuality and religion if that's taught in a school. We will be adjusting that to an opt-in for human sexuality and broadening that definition to include topics related to gender identity and/or gender orientation.

We have heard a number of concerns from parents across the province who – there have been situations where their child is participating in a conversation or participating in a presentation by a third-party group on topics of gender identity, human sexuality and parents are not informed or involved or have the ability to provide their consent for their child to participate because right now the legislation specifies that you can only opt out if it deals with human sexuality, so other topics such as gender identity would not be covered. That's why we're making these amendments.

Of course, our primary objective and motivation in making this amendment is to ensure that parents are informed and that parents are involved in their child's education. We, I know, on this side of the House believe that parents are full and equal partners and more so are the primary drivers of their child's education and thus should be fully informed about every aspect concerning their child's education: presentations, third-party presentations, or anything else occurring at a school. We want to make sure that is protected and that parents are involved to the highest degree possible.

Now, I don't think I need to go into detail about why it's important and essential for parents to be involved in their kids' education. I would suspect and I would hope and I would think that it's a nonpartisan issue and that even members from the opposition support the idea of parents being involved to the highest degree possible in their child's education.

I have heard comments and criticism over the course of this conversation that does lead me to suspect that maybe they don't want parents to be fully informed of topics that are being discussed at school or don't want parents to be fully informed and think that they, the school board, or other groups know best and that they should just do what they feel is best and the parents don't really need to know, but that's not the approach that we take on this side.

Furthermore, the bill also ensures that parents are notified and provide their consent should a child seek to change their preferred name and/or pronouns. Furthermore, the bill also provides the government of Alberta through the Minister of Education the ability to approve any and all third-party presenters and material, learning and teaching resources, that deal primarily and explicitly with gender identity, gender orientation, and human sexuality. If a third-party organization wants to approach a school and provide information to students, I believe it's important that that third-party organization has been properly and appropriately vetted and the material that they are going to provide to students has been properly and appropriately vetted.

Again, we have heard numerous concerns about inappropriate material being provided to students that, quite frankly, they should not be experiencing. We've seen this occur in other jurisdictions; Alberta is no different, and we continue to see inappropriate material finding its way into our classrooms, into our school libraries, and finding its way into the hands of young students. This is inappropriate, and it's incumbent on the government to ensure that any such inappropriate material is not reaching the hands of young students and young individuals.

4:00

Ms Chapman: Unless you're in a religious school.

Mr. Nicolaides: Yes. Thank you for the clarification. Unless the material is to be used for religious purposes. That is a different category because, of course, the government should not be in the situation to approve a religious text that has been prepared for delivery in a faith-based school that deals with topics of human sexuality and/or faith. Of course, ensuring the free practise of faith is a right of every Albertan, and the government should not interject there.

That being said, I want to address as well some of the concerns that they've raised and some of the conjecture and inaccurate misinformation that a lot of members have provided during the course of this debate. You know, one of the main criticisms that I've heard as it relates to this debate is that moving to an opt-in is going to be problematic. A lot of members have noted that parents won't see the forms. They'll be stuffed in the bottom of a backpack. Parents won't see it. Parents won't return the forms, and their student will miss out on important sex education.

Mr. Speaker, what a terribly low opinion of parents. You know, I know that parents are busy and have a lot going on, but I also know that parents are incredibly invested in their child's well-being and in their child's education. I'm confident that parents will be able to find the forms and submit them as appropriate if they so desire.

We have, of course, a number of other measures where a similar opt-in type of process occurs, and this is any time there's going to be any other kind of activity at school such as a field trip or a visit to a science centre or some other kind of activity. Guess what happens in that scenario, Mr. Speaker. The parents must opt in. And guess what happens in the vast majority of circumstances. Students end up going on their field trips and going to the science centre without additional challenges.

I know, of course, that this is being assisted and supported with modern technology. Just with my kids, on my phone I think I have three or four different apps. Teachers use Google Classroom, Seesaw, ClassDojo, Remind, you name it, as a way to be able to communicate directly with parents, remind them of the forms that need to be submitted. So we're operating in a much different space. Even if you did leave the form crumpled up in the backpack, hopefully, you have an e-mail address or you have an app subscribed to your phone where staff can communicate with you to remind you to send in that form. So I don't accept the premise that parents are too busy and unable to find forms and return them. Again, I think it's a very low opinion of parents and families of Alberta to suggest that they can't find forms and return them.

In addition, some members have noted that moving to an opt-in will mean that a number of students will miss out on important sex education. Again, they attribute this to the inability of parents to return the forms. Now, again, I'm fully confident that parents will have the ability to return forms, but I challenge the members opposite. I did this in previous debate, and I still have yet to see the scientific data and information to suggest that an opt-in model means fewer children participating in sex education.

I actually offer information to the contrary, Mr. Speaker. I'll point to Nevada, and if the members want to look it up, they're happy to. This is information that comes directly from the Nevada state Legislature, which is one of four jurisdictions in the United States that does have an opt-in. Only 1 per cent of parents opt their children out of sex education: complete the forms, send it in, and opt their child out. In fact, state-wide, from middle school to high school and to other, the state-wide percentage of parents who fill in the forms and return them in is 95 per cent.

Again, their whole premise is that these forms won't be returned and students will miss out on important sex education, but if we look objectively from jurisdictions that have this model, the subscription rate is incredibly high. I'm confident ours will be as high if not higher, and students will receive a robust sex education if that, of course, is the discretion of their parents.

Furthermore, I do want to highlight just how robust and essential our sex education curriculum is, and I want to commend the previous

Minister of Education, who in her tenure undertook a significant revision of Alberta's K to 6 curriculum in a number of subjects, including physical education and wellness, which is where the home for sex education is for grades 4 to 6. I want to provide members with a quick overview of what our sex education curriculum currently covers to demonstrate that it is indeed robust and that students will learn the important elements they need to live healthy and fulfilling lives.

In grade 4 students begin learning about puberty, learning about personal hygiene, and positive relationships. In grade 5 they learn about human reproduction and menstruation. In grade 6 they learn about pregnancy, reproductive health, intercourse, and STIs, and I want to commend the previous Minister of Education for introducing elementary kids and to making sure that elementary kids learn about STIs and other negative implications as early as grade 6 and as early as elementary education. In grade 7 students learn about healthy relationships, sexual activity, body image. In grade 8 they learn about sexual abuse, symptoms of STIs, contraception. In grade 9, safe sex; in addition, sexual assault and other pieces.

As you can see, Mr. Speaker, our government is proud to be able to deliver a robust sex education curriculum to all Albertans, and at the same we're also very happy to ensure that parents are fully informed about their child's education, that inappropriate material is not making its way into the hands of young individuals, and that parents have, always, the full and final authority about what type of education their child is going to receive.

Now, I know I have about probably three minutes, two minutes left, so I will conclude my remarks, and I'm confident the moment I do that, Mr. Speaker, all you're going to hear from the opposition is more fear, misinformation, and conjecture.

Member Irwin: Stats. Data. Evidence.

Mr. Nicolaides: Now, the member opposite has said stats and data. I will be listening intently to stats and data, and I have been curious to know, specifically as it relates to an opt-in versus an opt-out, what kind of stats and information they have to suggest that moving to an opt-in means that fewer students in Alberta will receive sex education. They're going to provide you stats about sex education and STIs and teen pregnancy. Those are the stats that they're going to provide you, but no one is discounting that a robust sex education helps you to tackle STIs, teen pregnancies, and other challenges, which is why we have developed a robust sex education curriculum and have that in our schools.

I'll be listening intently to hear the stats. So far, through second reading and through committee, I haven't, Mr. Speaker, but hopefully they can make their closing arguments here. Again, I encourage all members to support third reading and again move third reading. I move third reading of Bill 27, Education Amendment Act, 2024.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move an amendment.

The Speaker: Excellent. To expedite this process, if you can bring me the amendment, I'll get a copy to the table and our copy, and then I'll ask you to proceed as soon as that's done.

Hon. members, this will be referred to . . . [interjection] Order. Order. Order. Hon. members, this will be referred to as amendment HA1.

The Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move this amendment HA1. It is a hoist amendment, and if passed, does what this bill deserves, which is to end further consideration of the bill.

4:10

We have been in debate on Bill 27, like bills 26 and 29, a suite of legislation that we know is damaging to our transgender community, and this particular piece of legislation does not deserve to be considered and to move forward because of the damage that it does with forced outing of kids who reach out to a trusted and safe teacher in their life.

We attempted amendments to try and protect children, very reasonably thought out amendments that the minister rejected, completely ignoring in both his remarks now and throughout this debate the real risk and harm that he is placing kids in as well as the fact that the minister continues to play games around the fact that Alberta has an opt-in system that works, that puts parents in the driver's seat, yet the minister is putting up bureaucratic red tape that will harm the access to sex education for children.

The premise is not that parents are too busy; that is not the argument. The premise is that additional steps make opt-in a much harder bar for people to clear. The only natural outcome from changing from an opt-out to an opt-in system is fewer people getting sex education. Fewer people getting that human sexuality education will lead to an increase in sexually transmitted diseases, teen pregnancies, and the like. Parents can and should be involved in Alberta. They are; we all agree. On how that happens we are in stark disagreement, because, of course, the minister I think has been disingenuous with some of the arguments as he put forward this bill.

Finally, I will simply say that the minister throughout this debate has never once tabled any examples of inappropriate materials. When we talk about someone who is trying to incite fear, I think that is a perfect example and, again, harms our debate.

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

The Speaker: A point of order is noted.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order
Allegations against a Member

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Opposition House Leader has now referred to the minister personally multiple times in her speech, including in saying that he personally is creating fear. I'll remind the Speaker of his decision on April 23, 2024, on page 1209 of *Hansard*, which was a point of order where the member who used the phrase "the member is creating fear" withdrew and apologized. I would ask as well the Opposition House Leader to refrain from personal attacks and to do her best to make sure she directs comments through the chair and to follow precedent of your ruling in this House.

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: I will apologize and withdraw in the interest of time, Mr. Speaker.

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

Debate Continued

Ms Gray: I would like to conclude my remarks, having moved this hoist, because I look forward to hearing what my colleagues also have to say on this.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition has moved amendment HA1. This is a debatable motion. Is there anyone else wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington has risen.

Ms Chapman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm grateful to have the opportunity to speak in support of this amendment. Let's hoist this bad bill on out of here, right?

When the minister introduced this bill and again in the comments he just made, he made these promises that it would provide clarity, consistency, and transparency, this idea that parents across the province would then be more involved and have a larger say in their child's education. Now, I've read this bill cover to cover, I've watched very closely everything the minister has been communicating about the changes this bill makes, and I can confidently say that the idea that this bill will result in parents being more involved or having a larger say in their child's education really couldn't be further from the truth.

When we look at the changes being made to access sexual health information, it is abundantly clear that nothing will change for parents aside from having to fill another form with their school. There is nothing in this bill or in the amendment that the government put forward that compels school boards to provide more information to have parents become more involved in the process of deciding whether their child is going to opt in or opt out of the sexual health curriculum pieces.

We have an opt-out process that works well right now. Members of this House will know the Alberta School Boards Association passed a motion calling on this government to keep that current, well-functioning opt-out system. So it's not school boards that were asking for this change.

The vast majority of parents I have spoken to have only voiced confusion as to why the UCP is focusing their attention on this very niche issue. They have kids in overcrowded classrooms. They have kids with complex needs that aren't being met. They have kids that are busing halfway across the city because the UCP hasn't bothered to build a school in their community. These parents don't understand why the government isn't focusing on those issues.

Who is it exactly who was asking for this process change? If it's not school boards, it's not teachers, it's not parents, who is the stakeholder that the UCP is listening to, and why won't the minister simply be transparent about who exactly was asking for these changes? At no time has the minister been able to provide any reasoning for why a change in the opt-out/opt-in process is necessary. If, as the minister just suggested, this will have no impact on participation rates, why is he pushing forward with this change? Although, I'm not sure how the minister is informing that position. He hasn't been able to tell us what the participation rates are in the sexual health curriculum currently, right? We haven't bothered to take a look at the data behind this. How many kids are opting in? How many kids are opting out? I don't know. Maybe the minister knows, but he hasn't bothered to share that with us.

When school boards notify parents when this curriculum piece is being taught, how does changing an opt-out to an opt-in give parents a larger say in their child's education? The answer is that it does not. The value of good-quality, comprehensive sexual health education is clear. You know, the minister varied his statement a little bit today, but he's claimed that we've provided no evidence to the veracity of the claim on the impact of good-quality sexual health education.

I have tabled numerous resources in the House that speak directly to the positive outcomes of good sexual health information: lower teen pregnancy rates, lower STI rates, prevention of dating and intimate partner violence, prevention of childhood sexual abuse, and delayed timing for first sexual encounters. The American Academy of Pediatrics sums it up perfectly. Comprehensive sex education curriculum goes beyond risk reduction by covering a broader range of content that has been shown "to support social-emotional learning, positive communication skills, and development of healthy relationships." Those are outcomes that all parents can get behind.

The UCP simply isn't putting the needs and well-being of the child first with this bill. Instead of talking to parents about the value of a comprehensive sexual health curriculum, they are building barriers between kids and this important education. For this reason and many more I will be voting for this amendment. Hoist this bill on out of here. I encourage all members of the House to do the same.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has risen.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I welcome the opportunity to speak to this bill. This bill takes away the rights of a minority. It's one of three bills, close to a quarter of the government's legislative agenda. This is a small minority group, but I would urge everyone to remember that once governments see that they can get away with taking away the rights of a minority, history tells us that other minorities will soon follow.

I've had the opportunity to speak in this place about the fact that members of the UCP were in this House in 2015 when all parties voted in favour of adding gender identity and gender expression to the human rights code, yet many of those same members now vote to roll back the very rights they voted in favour of. Mr. Speaker, it's shameful.

Today I would like to focus on another aspect of this bill, comprehensive sexual health education. A lot has been said in this place about opt-in versus opt-out, but I will simply say that the government's position is transparently absurd. Parents presently have the right to decide whether their children will be exposed to the material or not. There is a small mountain of evidence, some of which has been tabled already in this House, demonstrating that these sorts of administrative hurdles that the government is putting up are put in place solely for the purpose of denying those children access to that education, education which we absolutely know lowers the rate of STIs, which we absolutely know lowers the rate of intimate partner violence, which we absolutely know lowers the rate of sexual violence.

4:20

Mr. Speaker, I have always believed that as a woman my daughter would have it better than I do, but this government is making that very unlikely. By denying children rights to a comprehensive sexual health education, by putting up these hurdles to intentionally block children from this education, this minister is making the world a little bit worse for our daughters. I think our children deserve a lot better than this.

And it's not just that one administrative hurdle. Page 5 of the bill dealing with section 7(2):

> A board shall not . . . permit the use or provision of learning and teaching resources that deal primarily and explicitly with gender identity, sexual orientation or human sexuality unless the learning and teaching resources are approved by the Minister.

Apparently, this minister is now, despite many experts in this province, the highest expert on what children will learn about. What that allows him to do, potentially, is write out of existence the experiences of some people. That is an incredible problem. Denying the right of our children to learn about different minority groups is an enormous problem.

I would urge every member of this House to vote in favour of this hoist, which is what this bill so supremely deserves, and to vote against the bill. Thank you.

The Speaker: On amendment HA1, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish I were here rising on a more positive note. Instead of rising to speak to a bill that does nothing but make schools in our province less safe, I wish I were talking about the progress we're making collectively to build the province that we know is possible. I wish that instead of debating legislation that attacks a vulnerable community, our trans friends and neighbours, we were here to debate legislation that would tangibly improve their lives and the lives of all Albertans.

Why can't we be debating bills about health care, about education, about affordability and trying to make life less expensive for our constituents? Why can't we? Because the UCP have made an intentional, deliberate choice to distract and deflect from the real issues that matter to all of you. Their hope? By targeting a marginalized community, they hope that we won't discuss their failings as a government. That's shameful, and that's cowardly.

Now on to the specifics of the bill, Bill 27. I've spoken to this bill previously, but I wanted to get on the record once more. I want to once again speak to all those folks out there who will be impacted by this and the other terrible pieces of legislation. I see that once again we have some fantastic folks from the community that are watching. Thank you for being here and for bearing witness, and thank you . . . [interjections] Yeah.

I know there's a whole – I said I wasn't going to get emotional – lot of people watching at home as well who have put up a big fight and who've written to all of us, who've reached out, who've tried to stop this government from passing these bills. But, as we've seen, they're intent on moving forward. The teacher in me, the member of the 2SLGBTQ-plus community – I've talked about this – Bill 27, the Education Amendment Act, 2024, hits me pretty hard, but I know that it hurts a lot of other people far more.

I won't talk too much about the specifics of this bill because my colleagues have done an incredible job getting those on the record and explaining just how harmful they are. But a few of the pieces are alarming; for instance, the piece around implementing new requirements for parental notification and consent around 2SLGBTQ-plus content, creating the opt-in system, which I'll talk about in a moment, and mandating parental notification and consent for name and pronoun changes.

As someone who was a classroom teacher and also someone who worked for years for the province of Alberta in the Ministry of Education under multiple Conservative governments, multiple Conservative ministers of Education, and then for a little bit under the NDP and our NDP Minister of Education, the Member for Edmonton-North West, I can tell you we engaged in a whole lot of conversations about issues related to this, and I can tell you that none of these changes are needed. If you ask classroom teachers if these changes are needed, they'll tell you absolutely not. So what is this government trying to fix, I ask?

I've spoken a lot about why it's absurd to make schools less safe for kids, why it's absurd to put kids in potentially unsafe situations. I don't have to tell members of this Chamber that there are a lot of young people who don't have a safe space at home. For many of those young people school might be their only refuge, and you want to take that away.

I want to register one more concern, one concern that the minister talked a little bit about and I promised I would respond to, and that's the sexual health piece, turning it to an opt-in system instead of opt-out. The minister talked about how, you know, his own experience, he's got all these apps on his phone wherein he's able to track his kids and their forms. Through you, Mr. Speaker, that is such a privileged position that you're coming from. It's anecdotal, but I guarantee you I could find countless examples of parents in my riding. I'm so proud to represent Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, but we have some of the highest rates of poverty and child poverty in the city and in the province. I can tell you – think about that newcomer mom who's working multiple jobs, who doesn't have the access to technology that that minister and his colleagues do, right? Just put yourself in the shoes of someone else.

As my colleagues and I discussed as well – I know I'm not a parent, but I sure as heck was a teacher. I know that a lot of the times when forms aren't getting home, it's not necessarily on the parents either. Kids drop the ball. They really do, right? They really do. I know my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud talked about her own experience. She would say that she's a very privileged person herself, but she talked about how many times she's discovered a crumpled-up permission form in the bottom of her daughter's backpack. Just please think about how unnecessary and unfair this is.

The minister talked about Nevada, Nevada being the hallmark to which we should all aspire. Nevada, the very state that also ranks 46th in the U.S. in terms of quality of education: what a place to aspire to be. Unbelievable.

I do want to talk about STIs, as that minister referred to as well, because I'm so worried about what this means for STIs and for those rates increasing. We just commemorated World AIDS Day on December 1. I had the opportunity to spend a bit of time with HIV Edmonton, an organization that's doing incredible work to support folks living with HIV and AIDS and to try to address the stigma. We're not going to address the stigma, we're not going to make progress by making it more difficult for young people to access comprehensive sexual health education in their classrooms.

We learned that HIV rates in Alberta are up 73 per cent, nearly doubled since 2019. Why would we not be doing everything in our power to address this? Opting in is not going to fix this. It's going to make things worse, mark my words. It's not too late for this minister and the UCP to do the right thing, to accept our hoist amendment and to kill these bills.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on amendment HA1 the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Remarks in Cree]

My name is she who walks on the Earth until her hair turns grey. I am from Michel First Nation. Johnny Calahoo was my great-grandfather. [As submitted]

You may have seen his plaque near the rotunda. There's a plaque honouring Johnny Calahoo, who was my chapan. He did great work in education. He was the son of a treaty signatory, the Michel chief, who was my chief. I want to remind you of these things to remind you of where you are located, in my homelands. We have nowhere else to go, and we have lived here sustainably since millennia.

In our language, Nehiyawewin, there are seven pronouns that can be used, and none of them are he and she. None of them are about gender: niya, I; kiya, you; wiya, they, them; and, of course, the plural versions of these. We speak about niya, kiya, wiya, wiyanaw, in the plural or in the singular – they, them, I, you – because we recognize people for who they are. You see, you have ways like we have ways, and in our ways we see the two-spirit as very sacred and important.

4:30

Our most celebrated ceremony is the sun dance ceremony. For some of you it might be Christmas or Ramadan, but for us it's the sun dance. The most sacred part of that sun dance is the climbing of the majestic pole that gets erected up, that we will all dance around, and fast for four days and four nights, singing and praying, giving thanks to God, Gitchi Manitou, giving thanks to Creator for this life, for the water, for the plants, the animals.

In order for us to be able to do that prayer ceremony, that two-spirit person has to climb the pole and build the nest at the top because they are the visionaries. They are the sacred holders. They are the ones that we put most high in our culture, to protect them, to love them, to recognize them for who they are. You see, they have a gift. They understand the masculine and the feminine. We see that as a balance, as something to empower, and to have a gift of understanding. To know how to walk in both worlds of the masculine and the feminine is of great balance and of great importance to governance and to our spirituality.

Today the 2SLGBTQQIA-plus youth council at the Assembly of First Nations brought their flag into the highlight of the AFN, which AFN said that they're committed to creating a safe space for two-spirit and gender-diverse relatives. The AFN states: we acknowledge the resilience of the two-spirit, and we promote the voice of two-spirit and gender-diverse people; we want to raise awareness of the ongoing discrimination that they face.

You see, school sometimes is the safest place for children to explore and discover who they are, and now you've outed them. Sometimes children aren't ready to discover who they are, and they need that safe place.

This bill is detrimental, and it contravenes treaty. It's dangerous, and it's hurtful. Vote against Bill 27.

The Speaker: Any other members on the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Daniel Kahneman is one of the few holders of a Nobel prize in economics who does not actually have a PhD in economics. Instead, his PhD is in psychology. Over the years his contribution to economic thought has been so significant that the Swedish academy that awards Nobel prizes had to award him with the Nobel prize in economics because of the work that he did on decision theory. One of the most important pieces of work that he did on decision theory was around default options, just the importance of opt-in versus opt-out when you want to nudge people in order to do something.

Now, his landmark paper, between Kahneman and his co-worker Tversky, who I believe shared the Nobel prize, in 1981 documented with exceptionally high-quality research that when people are given a default option, they usually take it. Again, this is research that has existed since 1981. There have been thousands upon thousands of citations of the original paper. It has spawned an entirely new field of economics known as behavioural economics and is exceedingly well-known to everyone who is making policy. So to say, "Oh, opt-in versus opt-out won't matter at all" is highly inconsistent with literally decades of research done by very high-quality people.

In fact, government has actually incorporated that research into their policy-making. One example is that when Revenue Ruling 98-30 by the IRS required 401K plans in the United States – these are similar to our RRSPs – the amount of people participating in their company retirement plans over the years went up from 37 per cent to 74 per cent. This is free money, Mr. Speaker – free money – as part of their retirement savings programs that people were not accepting from their employers because they didn't check a box on a form. The minute they changed that check box, the entire system reversed. This is seen as an extraordinarily important public policy success, forcing people to opt out rather than requiring them to opt in.

Now, to that extraordinary public policy success we will need to add what Alberta is doing around our sexual health curriculum. This is intentional, Mr. Speaker. This change is intentional. The government must know exactly what this is going to do to the rate of people, of our children who are getting educated on sexual health. May I remind this House of what my esteemed colleague sitting beside me, the Member for Calgary-Beddington, talked about: the rates of sexually transmitted disease that will go higher because fewer children will be taking sexual health; the rates of assault that, sadly, will go higher; the rates of abuse that will go higher.

If this government cared about children, they would not be funding our schools at the lowest level of any province in this country. For the people of Alberta, I would respectfully suggest that they judge this government by its actions. They have a lot of fancy words that they're using to obfuscate what they're actually going to do, but their actions are to put our children in harm's way.

Finally, let me talk about mandatory outing. Mr. Speaker, my heart bleeds for these children. We proposed an amendment because the government had said: no, this doesn't out anyone. The Premier has said: no, no; I don't support outing anyone. Then we proposed an amendment to clarify that teachers are not required to out anyone, and that amendment was defeated by this government. Now teachers are faced with just the worst task when they find out something about their student: do I follow the law, or do I help my student? I don't wish that on anyone. I think it's shameful, and I think it's awful.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question on the amendment as proposed by the Leader of the Official Opposition.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment HA1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:40 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Al-Guneid	Elmeligi	Kayande
Batten	Eremenko	Loyola
Boparai	Ganley	Metz
Brar	Goehring	Notley
Calahoo Stonehouse	Gray	Pancholi
Ceci	Haji	Sabir
Chapman	Hayter	Schmidt
Dach	Hoffman	Shepherd
Deol	Hoyle	Sigurdson, L.
Eggen	Irwin	Sweet
Ellingson	Kasawski	Wright, P.

Against the motion:

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

Totals: For – 33 Against – 47

[Motion on amendment HA1 lost]

The Speaker: Hon. members, it being a hoist amendment, I am required to put all questions to the Assembly to dispose of third reading.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:45 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Al-Guneid	Elmeligi	Kayande
Batten	Eremenko	Loyola
Boparai	Ganley	Metz
Brar	Goehring	Notley
Calahoo Stonehouse	Gray	Pancholi
Ceci	Haji	Sabir
Chapman	Hayter	Schmidt
Dach	Hoffman	Shepherd
Deol	Hoyle	Sigurdson, L.
Eggen	Irwin	Sweet
Ellingson	Kasawski	Wright, P.

Totals: For – 47 Against – 33

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a third time]

4:50

Bill 29
Fairness and Safety in Sport Act

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader, the Minister of Tourism and Sport.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to move third reading of the Fairness and Safety in Sport Act.

This bill delivers on our government's unwavering commitment to creating a fair and safe sport environment in Alberta for young women and girls, and it is to them that I dedicate this speech and this bill because, Mr. Speaker, it is incumbent upon us as a government to create an environment that is fair and safe for all young girls and women who want to compete. Sports teach you how to overcome challenges, how to strive for your personal best, how to respect your opponents, and that is something that even comes in handy in this House.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For many athletes, myself included, the friendships formed on the field, the court, or the track last a lifetime, Madam Speaker. The power of sport can shape lives in positive ways, and it's what makes it so crucial that every Albertan has the opportunity to fairly and safely experience the benefit of sport, because sport is for everyone, and every athlete deserves a fair and safe environment in which to compete.

Now, I appreciate the robust debate that has occurred in this Chamber on this bill so far, and I'd like to discuss some of the comments made during this debate. Members of the opposition spoke at length, saying that what Albertans really need is increased access to sport and recreation in our province. Well, Madam Speaker, if they'd been paying any attention, they'd be aware that our government has already created programs to address those very concerns. I'm happy to reiterate those for the people in this House and for the edification of those watching online, beginning with the active communities initiative, which is a $30 million commitment to creating and upgrading sport and recreation infrastructure in communities in every corner of the province.

Madam Speaker, we also launched the every kid can play program, which helps to make sport accessible, which is helping approximately 10,000 young Albertans every year register for sport by helping underprivileged families cover the cost of registration. It also provides funding for nonprofit organizations that run sport and recreation programs so they can serve more children, they can run coaching clinics, they can rent facilities and rent equipment so kids can learn how to play sport properly and safely.

Additionally, this summer our government provided $400,000 to Sport Central and the Flames Sports Bank, two organizations that provide sport equipment to kids across the province. We do all this, Madam Speaker, because our government is committed to breaking down financial barriers that prevent Albertans from engaging in sport and recreation in our province.

Now, we also heard, Madam Speaker, the NDP claiming that the biological and physiological differences inherent between the sexes have no impact on sport performance. That claim is just blatantly false. The opposition overlooked the inherent physical differences between biological males and females and how these differences impact athletes, specifically biological female athletes, who are forced to compete against stronger, faster, more physically capable biological male athletes against their will.

They ignore the experiences of the women who have spoken out in support of this legislation like Hannah Pilling, a constituent of mine who spoke at our press conference for this legislation. They ignore the studies that have shown that female athletes are more vulnerable to sustaining serious injuries when female-only sports are opened up to biological males, resulting in knocked-out teeth, neural impairment, broken bones, and skull fractures, concussions; the evidence that even in nonelite sport the least powerful man can produce more power than the most powerful woman and at that where men and women have roughly the same levels of fitness, men can punch with approximately 126 per cent more strength than the average woman.

Sport is inherently physical, Madam Speaker, so to deny the impacts of biological and physiological differences of the sexes in sport is absurd. It's absurd. If the opposition aren't convinced by these numbers, there are examples that are closer to home. Currently here in Alberta four of the five powerlifting records in the female 84-plus kilo class are held by biological males. Absurd. When women competing in that division began questioning if it was fair, they were suspended from their sport, and they were told that they should, quote, lose some weight so they wouldn't have to compete against more physically powerful biological male competitors.

Women in our province should not be backed into a corner like this and told that their own safety and well-being in sport comes

second. I will not look at my daughter or any young girl in this province and tell her that in women's sports their needs come second, and any parent who is willing to do that is not on the right side of this issue, Madam Speaker.

We have heard members of the opposition make ridiculous claims about women in sport. I can tell you that they are off the – I'll be parliamentary. They are wrong. I ask through you to the members opposite: why do you want to see young women and girls hurt playing sports? Why do you care so little about young women and girls who want to compete at a high level in this province, who want a chance for scholarships, who want a chance for sponsorships, who want a chance to compete at the highest level and those opportunities be robbed? Why do they care so little? Madam Speaker, that is what I'm hearing from the members opposite. They don't understand the science of this, and they obviously don't understand the competitive side of this. I do, and I'm doing this to protect the safety of women and girls and the integrity of women's sports in the province of Alberta.

Madam Speaker . . . [interjection] Now I hear the members opposite saying: so gross. So gross. Is it gross for me to stand in this Chamber and defend women's sports and the integrity of competition? Is it wrong for me, is it gross for me to stand in this Chamber and to defend the rights of young women who want to play, who want opportunities of scholarships? It is wrong. Shame on the members opposite for saying that.

Madam Speaker, in addition to protecting women-only sport divisions, this bill also takes proactive steps to support the formation of additional coed divisions where numbers warrant. These divisions will offer opportunities for all athletes to compete while preserving the fairness and safety of competitive sport. By expanding coed divisions, we are not only ensuring that transgender athletes have meaningful opportunities to compete, to participate but also promoting inclusivity of athletics across the board. Our government will work closely with applicable organizations to provide the resources and guidance necessary to support these new divisions.

Now, the opposition has asked about the consultation done with this legislation, and I can assure you, Madam Speaker, that this bill did not come together in isolation. Over the past several months our government has engaged in consultations with key stakeholders, including school authorities, postsecondary institutions, and provincial sport organizations as well as coaches, athletes, parents, members of the transgender community, and other subject matter experts to help inform our approach to creating a safe and fair system in sport.

I can tell you, Madam Speaker, from many personal experiences, as I've gone into meetings unrelated to this bill, that stakeholders have pulled me aside, mothers and fathers, and said: "By the way, I want to thank you for moving forward with this legislation. I have a daughter who's competing in this sport or that sport at this age group, and they just want to compete in a fair and a safe environment." We are seeing young female athletes leaving athletics at an alarming rate around the age of 12 or 13. It's not all because of this issue – I will concede that – but I can tell you that it is a factor.

The members opposite, of course, are whispering, and they're heckling because they have issues with this, and they say: how many transgender athletes have you recorded? Madam Speaker, we don't keep track of those numbers. But what I can tell you is that I have heard stories, real stories of athletes being hurt, who have lost out on competition and medals, opportunities to compete at the next level because of competing against transgender athletes. That is the only statistic that we need to move forward with this. As the members have said on other issues, one is too many.

Now, Madam Speaker, we listened carefully to all the concerns of stakeholders and their perspectives, and we incorporated their feedback to craft legislation that balances fairness, safety, and inclusivity in Alberta sports, something we've heard through our consultation with every organization and sport. They're all unique, and that is why our government is committed to providing clear guidance and assistance to the stakeholders as they navigate this legislation. We will work hand in hand with these organizations to make sure that they have the resources, the information, and the support they need to implement these changes and ensure the fairness and safety in sport that they oversee.

5:00

During debate the NDP rose and speculated wildly about the eligibility and enforcement process that will be put in place, asking that each and every detail be included in the legislation itself, Madam Speaker, but this bill creates a framework to address the issues of fairness and safety and it is standard practice to have procedural details worked out in regulation. Members of the opposition who were in government who are ministers would know that, and other members may not, but they're learning it today.

If passed, this legislation will take effect in the fall of 2025. In the coming months, we will work closely with our partners to ensure a smooth and fair implementation process.

In conclusion, I call on all members of the Assembly to support the Fairness and Safety in Sport Act because, Madam Speaker, sport is and always will be for everyone, and this legislation will help ensure all Albertan athletes can thrive in an environment that is fair and safe and inclusive.

With that, Madam Speaker, I move third reading of Bill 29, the Fairness and Safety in Sport Act. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to move an amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: This will be known as amendment HA1.

Hon. member, please proceed.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I've introduced a hoist amendment because I believe very strongly that this hoist should be passed and we should end further consideration of this bill. The bill deserves to be defeated as we've received feedback from a number of experts in many different ways specifically about the harm that this bill and the other two pieces of antitrans legislation will cause here in Alberta.

The minister was very, very flamboyant in his remarks. He shamed us, and I have to say: shame on him and shame on the government, Madam Speaker. Through hours of debate across these three antitrans pieces of legislation we have heard about the damage that will happen, including peer-reviewed studies that show that these types of antitransgender laws increase suicide attempts, increase suicides, and do measurable damage to the trans community. That the minister and members of government can stand here and use inflammatory rhetoric that we know will kill is incredibly – incredibly – disheartening and beneath the Chamber that we are in, in my opinion.

I will simply say that this bill should be hoisted because so many experts, including Canadian Women & Sport, feel that this type of legislation, know that this type of legislation, makes sports less safe, decreases participation. It will put Alberta out of sync with national and international sporting organizations. It is not, as opposed to what the minister said, backed by science, as has been proven by the number of excellent responses from our members who have quoted from everything from the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport, whose literature review does not support bans on transgender women athletes, to other evidence that has been submitted.

I will remind the government that they still to this day have not responded to media requests for who was consulted in the crafting

of these bills, leading us once again into a "trust us" situation, which we do not.

For all of these reasons I encourage all members to support the hoist amendment so that the bill does not get further considered.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment HA1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's, quite frankly, very upsetting that we are standing in this House talking about this bill. We have spent the majority of this session talking about three pieces of legislation that target the trans community from this government. I have to say that I am incredibly humbled by the amount of outpouring that we have received from personal experience, from members, Albertans sitting in this gallery time after time when we are in here talking about the truth, about the impacts of this hateful legislation and damaging legislation.

This amendment is absolutely necessary. There is absolutely nothing in this piece of legislation that's titled so sweetly, Bill 29, the Fairness and Safety in Sport Act, where the minister said the intention is to support all young women and girls, unless you're trans. That part was completely left out. You know, he went on and said that his goal is to create an inclusive and safe place for sport for everyone, unless you're trans. The only thing about this legislation that would make it successful is by supporting this amendment and stopping it.

There is so much information out there that this government is simply ignoring that supports inclusivity in sport. The importance of having all children participate in sport creates a healthy, stable situation for children, for families, and going after trans girls is dangerous. It is going to create the exact opposite of what the title of this bill is. It is not safe for trans girls and women. It creates a space where they're being targeted and excluded. The fact that the legislation doesn't even mention that, that it's being sheathed in these nice words and the supportive language: it's absolutely unacceptable that this piece of legislation moves forward.

You know, the minister quoted reports and talked about studies but failed to mention the full picture and the increased suicide rate in the trans community. Having a piece of legislation where there are already policies in place in professional sport: it's telling those bodies that this government knows better. The Olympics, NCAA, Athletics Canada all have policies in place to ensure safety and fairness, but this government is claiming that they know best and that by putting forward this legislation, they're creating a safe environment for sport. We know that is absolutely not the case.

As a mom, as a sports mom my children have played all different levels of sports, all different kinds of sports. I was team manager; I was coach. Never – my oldest is 30. Let's say he started playing soccer when he was three. I have never heard this come up from any parent, child ever that this is a piece of legislation that they felt would make their children more safe. When kids are active in sport, they feel loved, they feel supported, they feel included. This piece of legislation is creating a space where it is no longer safe for all kids. It is specifically targeting trans girls and women.

The only solution is to support this amendment and to stop this piece of legislation from going forward. There isn't an amendment that could alter the intention of this because the intention is to cause harm and exclude trans girls and women. I think that it's imperative of this Legislature, for so many watching, so many looking up to us as leaders in community, to do the right thing.

5:10

The minister said that we're wrong. I wholeheartedly disagree. We on this side of the House are on the right side of this conversation. We know that there are studies that talk about excluding people from sport. Feelings of isolation, depression, lower self-esteem go up. How is that safe? How is that fair when you're specifically targeting trans women and girls? It's deceitful to have this piece of legislation presented the way it is, not talk about the true intention, which we know is to exclude trans women and girls. I'm blown away that we're here at the end of 2024 talking about taking away human rights in Alberta. We should be talking about things that matter to Albertans, not the things that matter to their extreme right fringe group that they're trying to impress with this legislation.

People are going to die. Suicide rates will go up. We know this. So I plead with every member in this Chamber to please support this amendment. Do not allow this incredibly harmful piece of legislation to go any further, and vote in support of our amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members to amendment HA1? The hon. Minister of Tourism and Sport.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll rise very briefly and speak against this hoist amendment. I'll simply say this. On this side of the House we believe this legislation is the right move to ensure safety and fairness in sport. I have consulted broadly with stakeholders across the spectrum, including transgender athletes, individuals, who have expressed their support for this as well.

What I will say in closing is this. There are three names I want to read out. I want to ask the members what they would say to these individuals. What would the members opposite say to Hannah Pilling, who, without the support of a strong community petition, would not have been given the chance to compete at provincials and be given the chance to compete for a medal? What would the members say to her? Would they look her in the eye and tell her – what? – "Get faster; train harder"?

What would the members opposite say to Payton McNabb, who is no longer playing basketball after an injury that she sustained playing against a transgender athlete in this province? What would they say to her? "Recover from your concussion faster; recover from your PTSD faster; just get over it; toughen up"? What would the members opposite say to her? Look her in the eye.

Finally, what would the members opposite say to April Hutchinson, who has been marginalized, who has been called every name in the book, all because she stood for what she believed was right? What do the members say to her? Would they look her in the eye and tell her that she's wrong? Madam Speaker, they cannot because we are on the right side of this issue. History will show that.

As the Minister of Tourism and Sport I would not be doing my job if I wasn't standing in this Chamber and advocating for safe and fair sport in the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, on amendment HA1.

[The voice vote indicated that motion on amendment HA1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:14 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Al-Guneid	Elmeligi	Kayande
Batten	Eremenko	Loyola
Boparai	Ganley	Metz
Brar	Goehring	Notley
Calahoo Stonehouse	Gray	Pancholi

Ceci	Haji	Sabir
Chapman	Hayter	Schmidt
Dach	Hoffman	Shepherd
Deol	Hoyle	Sigurdson, L.
Eggen	Irwin	Sweet
Ellingson	Kasawski	Wright, P.

Against the motion:

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

Totals: For – 33 Against – 47

[Motion on amendment HA1 lost]

The Speaker: Hon. members, that being a hoist amendment, I am required to put to the Assembly all necessary questions to dispose of third reading.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:20 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Al-Guneid	Elmeligi	Kayande
Batten	Eremenko	Loyola
Boparai	Ganley	Metz
Brar	Goehring	Notley
Calahoo Stonehouse	Gray	Pancholi
Ceci	Haji	Sabir
Chapman	Hayter	Schmidt
Dach	Hoffman	Shepherd
Deol	Hoyle	Sigurdson, L.
Eggen	Irwin	Sweet
Ellingson	Kasawski	Wright, P.

Totals: For – 47 Against – 33

[Motion carried; Bill 29 read a third 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 32
Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2)

The Chair: I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods rising to speak.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, as we embark on Committee of the Whole on Bill 32, I would like to request your help. I would be interested splitting some of the clauses when it votes and comes out of Committee of the Whole, and I have a proposal for how to do that.

I'd like to request that for the votes on Bill 32 the clauses be separated as follows: sections 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, and 10 be voted on as block A and sections 4, 5, and 9 be voted on as block B. The reason for this is this bill covers two very distinct pieces to it. Block A relates mostly to the deindexation of Alberta tax brackets and social benefits whereas block B, to the best of our ability, deals with halal mortgage financing. If that is amenable to you, Chair, we would appreciate being able to have those two votes separate.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member, for your request.

The practice of this committee has been to allow a member to make a request to the chair of Committee the Whole that the clauses of the bill be separated into blocks for the purposes of voting after the debate on this bill has concluded in committee. The last example of such a request was on May 11, 2022, when a member asked that the clauses of Bill 17, Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, be separated and voted on in blocks, and the chair agreed to that request. Many members might remember, but sections of the budget are also done in such a manner in the past.

Accordingly, I grant the member's request that the clauses of Bill 32 be separated into the following two voting blocks, in which members will vote once the debate of the bill in Committee of the Whole has concluded. For the clarity of all members the pages will distribute the two voting blocks with the sections included for the benefit of members in this House.

That's that, and we will proceed with the debate. For the benefit of all members the proposal for block A, which I have granted, is sections 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, and 10, and block B sections 4, 5, and 9.

I think I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills rising to speak.

Mr. Ellingson: Indeed. I'd like to introduce an amendment to Bill 32.

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

Hon. member, please proceed.

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Madam Chair. Among other items, Bill 32, Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2), amends the Alberta

escalator, which is applied to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Act, the Income and Employment Supports Act, Seniors Benefit Act, Alberta Housing Act, and the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2).

The minister has been clear that Bill 32 applies an indexation to Alberta's tax brackets, AISH payments, housing allowances, income supports, and other social benefits. However, the important aspect of this bill, or an important aspect of this bill, is the introduction of a floor to that index. It applies the rate of 2 per cent or the rate of inflation, whichever is less.

5:30

"Whichever is less" is an important distinction. Should the rate of inflation exceed 2 per cent, 2 per cent is the index that is applied. Should wages be increasing at the rate of inflation or more, Albertans would see their taxes increase in real terms through bracket creep. Should the rate of inflation be higher than 2 per cent, those receiving AISH or income supports would see their payments decline in real terms. The amendment before the House corrects this error in the legislation and would apply the rate of inflation as the Alberta escalator.

It is a good idea to apply, through legislation, an index to tax brackets, AISH, housing allowances, income support payments, and more. However, I have to ask: why are we applying a floor to this legislated index? To be clear, applying a floor that is below the rate of inflation results in Albertans being subject to tax bracket creep. It results in Alberta's most financially vulnerable losing ground as inflation makes life more expensive, as costs around them increase but their incomes do not.

As the bill was prepared, inflation was close to 2 per cent in that moment. This, of course, gives the minister and the government the ability to say: "Nothing to see here. No big deal. Inflation is 2 per cent; we inserted 2 per cent. Same, same. No worries." The government will sweep this under the rug and say that there's no material difference between the rate of inflation in that moment and 2 per cent, but I think we all know that the rates of inflation fluctuate from month to month and year to year.

Indeed, the inflation rate for Alberta across the month of November was 3 per cent, not 2 per cent. That is close to the long-term running average of inflation over the last few decades in Canada, where it has been 3.15 per cent. We know that inflation has far exceeded 2 per cent since this government came in in 2019. Since that time Alberta has averaged 3.28 per cent, slightly higher than the national average of 3.26 per cent. Should we continue to see that, Alberta's most vulnerable living on AISH and income supports would see their real incomes decline year over year.

Let's be clear. We're talking about declining real incomes for those who are living on less than the average monthly rent for a one-bedroom apartment. Never mind the cost of groceries, transportation, and heaven forbid if somebody wanted to spend time with a friend, buying a coffee and not always relying on that friend or family member to be buying them the coffee. Let's give them a little bit of dignity.

Albertans experienced deindexation not that long ago. When, you might ask? Well, in 2020 and 2021, when this UCP government deindexed tax brackets and incomes from inflation. According to a study by the University of Calgary in that short period of time deindexation cost Albertans almost $650 million. It is estimated that for every point the rate of inflation exceeds the escalator, it would cost Albertans $100 million that year, $100 million not in the hands of Albertans, Albertans struggling every day to pay for the basics: housing, food, transportation.

Now, this legislation also allows the Treasury Board to opt out and set their own index rate that year. This amendment also influences how that right might be overridden and makes it not be less than the rate of inflation.

Indexing to the rate of inflation is essential to support Alberta's financially vulnerable citizens. It is also essential to prevent Albertans from being impacted by bracket creep. I'll remind the House that the former leader of the UCP back in 1997 stated that deindexation results in bracket creep and an increase to taxes paid. At first I thought it odd that a government promising a tax break would support bracket creep and an increase in taxes, but that tax break was promised before an election and has yet to materialize, so maybe it wasn't serious.

Let me return to the statement that I agree with, that we should index tax brackets, deductions, AISH payments, housing, income supports. We should apply an index, but that index should be the rate of inflation and not less, and the Treasury Board, if overriding the Alberta escalator, should not apply a rate that is less than inflation.

I urge the members of this House to accept this amendment and apply the rate of inflation as the Alberta escalator. To not do so is deindexing. It costs Albertans money, it forces vulnerable Albertans to live with less, and you're applying a hidden tax through bracket creep.

Thank you.

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

Member Kayande: Thank you, Madam Chair. This is sneaky; this is a really, really sneaky bill. See, back when I was a young legislator just new to this Chamber – I had stars in my eyes – Bill 1 in this session was the first and top priority for this government, where they demanded a referendum on any changes in income tax rates. Now, at the time I believe that many in this House made the argument: well, if the government wants to just not raise taxes, they can not raise taxes. Regardless, the bill passed.

Key elements of this Alberta Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act of 2023 speak to the following as being "income tax increases for the purposes of this Act," one of which is – and this is clause 3(b) now –

> a reduction of an amount expressed in dollars in section . . .

Blah, blah, blah.

> . . . of the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, after accounting for any adjustments to the amount under section 44.2 of that Act.

Not being a lawyer, I would read that and say: ah, that means they can't change indexing either. It turns out that's not true, and it was all a big psych.

Now we're going back to the days of he who must not be named, the Premier of Alberta between 2019 and – what? – somewhere in '22, one Hon. Jason Kenney, who, sadly, is not in the House and therefore I can name, who froze tax brackets, thereby costing Albertans – I don't know – $500 million.

Mr. Ellingson: Six fifty.

Member Kayande: Six hundred and fifty million dollars. Six hundred and fifty million dollars in additional taxes paid.

Oh, by the way, I have heard the minister of social services many, many times taking credit for, you know, indexing AISH after he deindexed it and the Minister of Finance taking credit for indexing tax brackets after deindexing them. It just reminds me very much of George W. Bush's very successful attack on John Kerry for having said that he opposed the Iraq War after first supporting it. It's just hilarious to me, the level of doublespeak that I continuously hear.

5:40

So let's speak clearly. This bill is a deindexation. This amendment fixes that deindexation problem that is built into this bill. It sets a

ceiling of 2 per cent on the rate of growth of the various different tax brackets, which will cost Albertans who pay money in taxes. It will cost them money. Is a zero per cent index possible? Yes. Absolutely, it is according to this bill.

Albertans have a right to expect that the money that they earn stays in their pockets unless there's a good reason otherwise. Look, I admit this: I don't much like paying taxes either. So the tax system has to be fair, and the money has to be used for purposes that make people's lives better. Turkish Tylenol: not so much. Privatizing lab services: maybe pass on that. The very idea that Albertans paid $650 million of additional taxes for a $1.2 billion pipeline to nowhere, $100 million for Turkish Tylenol, $100 million for a lab privatization fiasco should shock the conscience. It is utterly disrespectful of the people in this province.

I paid a lot of those taxes myself. Being somebody who pays taxes and seeing what was happening to the schools in 2022, that's when I decided to get really angry, and that's what brought me into this House, with an assist from the Premier for not holding a by-election when she held her own.

I will only say further that bracket creep is the sneakiest possible way to raise income taxes. Jason Kenney pointed this out – was it in '96? – when it was Prime Minister Chrétien who did the same trick.

An Hon. Member: It's creepy.

Member Kayande: It is very creepy. He called them bracket creeps, which is pretty funny.

You know, the UCP is now in the same boat: while proclaiming that they are the defender of the taxpayer, in actual fact taking advantage of every single loophole that they passed in order to make Albertans' lives worse.

Albertans need affordability. They don't need this nonsense.

The Chair: Any other members to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore. No?

Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1?

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: Back on the main bill.

Mr. Haji: Madam Chair, I rise today to speak to Bill 32, which includes changes to the ATB Financial Act and the Credit Union Act to enable provincially regulated financial institutions to offer alternative financing mortgages. However, Bill 32 in its current form falls short to enable Muslim Albertans access to affordable home ownership. I therefore would like to introduce an amendment to Bill 32.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A2.

Hon. member, please proceed.

Mr. Haji: Enabling halal financing home ownership is a meaningful step forward in addressing the needs of Muslim Albertans who seek halal-compliant financing to purchase homes. It represents a significant acknowledgement of the diversity in our province and the importance of inclusion in our economic systems.

I've had the opportunity to talk to Muslim Albertans. I had the opportunity to chat with the Minister of Finance and President of the Treasury Board and expressed the need to address the issue of affordability, that is comparable to a conventional mortgage product.

While this legislation is a step in the right direction, it does not fully meet the expectations of the community it seeks to serve. When I say that, Madam Chair, I don't speak to whether it is halal compliant or not. The Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism spoke about that on the various products, but I don't want to litigate that. We as legislators need to look at it from a policy perspective. After speaking with members of Alberta's Muslim community over the past 12 months, I believe that this bill as it stands requires further improvements to ensure it achieves its intended minimum goals, at least, to effectively address the home ownership barriers faced by Alberta's Muslim community.

One of the key concerns is the cost of halal mortgages. While noting that these products typically replace interest with alternative profit or fee structures, often through arrangements like rent-to-own or cost-plus profit models, unfortunately, in the absence of regulatory framework that enables profits while protecting consumers, these structures can lead to a higher cost that could be prohibitive to the borrowers.

While the legislation allows or enables halal mortgages to exist, it does little to ensure they are competitively priced, and it also does little to ensure they are comparable to the traditional mortgages. The government recognizes on one aspect the need for having comparability with the conventional mortgages, but it doesn't on the other side.

I quote the Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism when he spoke on the bill. "An important aspect of this act is an amendment to the Land Titles Act which ensures that fees associated with alternative financing mortgages remain comparable to those traditional mortgages." It is really interesting that the government recognizes the need to be at a comparable cost when it comes to the land fee but doesn't when it comes to the home ownership of the building.

The amendment that I have just introduced is seeking a similar comparable cost. Without comparable cost, Madam Chair, this would disadvantage Muslim Albertans who are already seeking a more inclusive financing option. It will be a huge lost opportunity. To address this, I propose that the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board develop regulations or guidelines that will enable comparable pricing of halal mortgage products with conventional mortgages.

Without these measures, we risk creating a system where such mortgages remain out of reach for many due to inflated cost of base and lack of competitive market to lower the ceiling price. Establishing affordability benchmarks that are comparable to conventional mortgages and conducting regular reviews would help prevent halal mortgages from becoming prohibitively expensive.

Another concern that I have heard quite a lot is the potential lack of competition in this space. At present ATB Financial is positioned to be the only institution that is enabled to offer these products under this legislation. Therefore, we need to put a regulatory framework in place, ensure that there is competitive pricing out in the market, and ensure that the costs of these products do not become prohibitive and therefore counterproductive to improving access to home ownership.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

5:50

The Chair: Any other members to amendment A2?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: Hon. members, seeking members wishing to speak to Bill 32 in Committee of the Whole.

Seeing none, I will call the question. As hon. members might remember, we will be voting on two different blocks when it comes to the clauses of the bill. Every member should have a copy of what that looks like.

[Sections 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, and 10 of Bill 32 agreed to]

[The voice vote indicated that sections 4, 5, and 9 of Bill 32 were agreed to]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:51 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

For:

Al-Guneid	Goehring	Nicolaides
Amery	Gray	Nixon
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Guthrie	Notley
Batten	Haji	Pancholi
Boitchenko	Hayter	Petrovic
Boparai	Hoffman	Rowswell
Bouchard	Horner	Sabir
Brar	Hoyle	Sawhney
Ceci	Hunter	Schmidt
Chapman	Irwin	Schow
Cyr	Jean	Schulz
Dach	Johnson	Shepherd
de Jonge	Kasawski	Sigurdson, L.
Deol	Kayande	Sigurdson, R.J.
Dreeshen	LaGrange	Sinclair
Dyck	Loewen	Singh
Eggen	Long	Turton
Ellingson	Lovely	van Dijken
Ellis	Loyola	Wiebe
Elmeligi	Lunty	Williams
Eremenko	McDougall	Wilson
Fir	McIver	Wright, J.
Ganley	Metz	Wright, P.
Getson	Nally	Yao
Glubish	Neudorf	Yaseen

Totals: For – 75 Against – 0

[Sections 4, 5, and 9 of Bill 32 agreed to unanimously]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

Mr. Williams: Madam Chair, I move that the committee rise and report on Bill 32.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. van Dijken: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 32. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

Mr. Williams: Well, Madam Speaker, it's wonderful to see a 75 to nothing vote in this Chamber, reminiscent of the Lougheed days.

In the meantime I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 7:30 this evening for us to continue this important debate.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:58 p.m.]

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