



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, March 10, 2025

Day 82

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
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Boitchenko, Andrew, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
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Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy Assistant Whip
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Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
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Eremenko, Janet, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
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Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),
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Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Edmonton-Strathcona

Party standings:

United Conservative: 48

New Democrat: 37

Independent: 1

Vacant: 1

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Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

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Bouchard
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Dyck
Hayter
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Sigurdson, L.
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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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Al-Guneid
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Calahoo Stonehouse
Dyck
Eggen
Hunter
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 10, 2025

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Mr. Gordon John Graydon September 19, 1942, to December 7, 2024

The Speaker: Hon. members, as is our custom, we pay tribute to members and former members of this Assembly who have passed since we last met. Gordon Graydon was elected the Progressive Conservative member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, serving two terms, 2001 to 2008. He was the minister of gaming from 2004 to 2006. Born and raised in Lacombe, Mr. Graydon graduated from SAIT in Calgary and then moved north to Grande Prairie to work with the Alberta Government Telephones. Turning to real estate, he served on the Grande Prairie Real Estate Board for a decade and was named an honorary life member.

Mr. Graydon entered politics in 1983, serving six terms on the Grande Prairie city council, including nine as the mayor. His involvement in numerous boards and associations such as the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, and the Canada Winter Games board of governors broadened his experience in community engagement and public service before moving into provincial politics. During his maiden speech Mr. Graydon expressed pride and anticipation in his new role, saying, "It's the set of the sails and not the gales that determine where we go." Among his honours Mr. Graydon received the Toastmasters International communication award in 1995 and the Queen Elizabeth II platinum jubilee medal in 2022.

Mr. Graydon passed away on December 7, 2024, at the age of 82. In a moment of silent prayer I ask you each to remember him as you may have known him. Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him.

Hon. members, it being the first sitting day of the week, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Ms Sarah Wolfe. I invite you to participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all of us command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

The Speaker: The Legislative Assembly is grateful to be situated on Treaty 6 territory. This land has been the traditional region of the Métis people of Alberta, the Inuit, and the ancestral territory of

the Cree, Dene, Blackfoot, Saulteaux, Iroquois, and Nakota Sioux people. The recognition of our history on this land is an act of reconciliation, and we honour those who walk with us. We further acknowledge that the province of Alberta exists within treaties 4, 7, 8, and 10 territories and the Métis Nation of Alberta.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's my honour and pleasure to rise today to introduce family members of the hon. Gordon Graydon who attended today's tribute. In the Speaker's gallery we have Gordon's loving wife, Anne Graydon; his daughter, Janine Saastad; son-in-law Tim; granddaughters Danielle Seymour, Jenna McDonald; son-in-law Mark Koob; grandsons Noah Koob and Troy Blackburn; as well as his great-grandson, Banks McDonald. I ask you to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

It's also my privilege and honour today to introduce guests joining us in the Speaker's gallery this afternoon. Sheila Ethier is the founder and executive director of Blankets of Love, an organization that provides quilts donated by volunteer quilters to patients in hospitals facing challenges with mental illness. She founded Blankets of Love while undergoing treatment for major depression. She's always felt the hospital was cold; she was looking for more blankets. One afternoon at home she came across a quilt her great-grandmother had made for her when she was a young girl. The comfort that she found in that quilt led her to start Blankets of Love. A number of you will have met them in the lower rotunda today. Since its inception in 1996, Blankets of Love has provided over 10,000 quilts in hospitals across Canada. Joining Sheila in my gallery today is one of the volunteers of Blankets of Love, Elaine Hole Pederson. Elaine is the niece of Lois Hole, Alberta's 15th Lieutenant Governor. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

And last but not least, joining us in the Speaker's gallery today, we all know the great debt of gratitude that we owe to the family who serves alongside an elected member. Joining us today in the gallery, the family of the Member for Lesser Slave Lake, Shantelle Sinclair and daughter, Sloan Sinclair. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West has a school group to introduce.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Edmonton-South West and on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, I'm proud to introduce the grade 6 students from Glenora school and their teacher, Joanne Walczak. I had an opportunity to chat with them before, and I'm especially happy to see Andrew Gilroy-Kiel in the in the Legislature today. He's a son of a good friend of mine, so happy to see them. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Happy to rise and introduce to you and through you the fabulous grade 6 students at St. Elizabeth Seton school in the fabulous community of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview here with their teachers. If they could please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

Mr. Haji: It's my pleasure, Mr. Speaker, to rise and introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly grade 6

students of St. Philip Catholic school, 13 of them in the public general gallery and 12 of them in the members' general. I ask you to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce you to Estella Bendall. She's here with Glenora elementary. The Edmonton Oilers Community Foundation had a rookie writer contest, and Estella wrote the story *Where's Hunter* and won the contest. Estella, would you please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pleasure to introduce to you and through you Dr. Austin Mardon, adjunct professor at the U of A, U of L, and NorQuest College. As you can see, he is well decorated with many medals, awards for his work in community and academia, including sharing his story of schizophrenia. With him is Eric Hodgson, a psychology student whose story is included in a piece Austin recently published in the *Calgary Herald* on the value of community treatment orders over forced confinement. I ask them to receive the warm welcome of this House, as well as Kon Kon and Samuel Malott-Rogal here as my volunteers.

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

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce my friend, former ER doctor Dr. Chris Shoemaker. Dr. Shoemaker presented at our first Injection of Truth town hall as well as recently testified at the National Citizens Inquiry. Dr. Shoemaker, will you please rise to receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Are there other introductions?

Seeing none, hon. members, prior to moving to members' statements, I would like to take a small moment of Speaker latitude for this year's Commonwealth message.

Statement by the Speaker

Commonwealth Day Message from the King

The Speaker: Hon. members, the theme for this year's Commonwealth Day, Together We Thrive, seems especially important as it highlights the significance of unity, peace, and equality. Canada alone is one country representing 40 million people. We are strong and we survive. Canada is one of 56 member nations of the Commonwealth, representing 2.7 billion people. We'll not only survive, but together we thrive. Working together for prosperity, democracy, and peace seems like a simple concept but one that has become so complex during these unprecedented times.

Before he was King, Prince Charles once said, "Just as mankind had the power to push the world to the brink so, too, do we have the power to bring it back into balance." Let those words sink in for a while as we find ways to use our strength to do our part to bring the world back into balance.

This year in his Commonwealth Day message His Majesty King Charles III reminds us that our differences are a source of strength and opportunity and not the root of our problems, that the people of the Commonwealth continue to be united in spirit of support and friendship. Members, copies of His Majesty's speech are on your desk along with the message of the Commonwealth secretary-general. I want to second His Majesty in saying that the

Commonwealth continues to be a strong force for global unity, and it is my greatest hope that it remains steadfast for the sake of our younger generation's peace and security.

Long live the King.

Members' Statements

Municipal Grants in Place of Taxes

Mr. McDougall: It's no secret; Alberta's population is growing rapidly and for good reason. Under the leadership of our Premier, our province has a comparatively low cost of living, good-paying jobs, and our government just cut income taxes, saving Alberta families up to \$1,500 a year. While this is great news, this means that there are more people relying on their municipalities to deliver essential services such as roadwork, snow clearing, and transit than ever before. Being able to meet the needs of our province's rapidly growing population is a top priority for Alberta's government, and we know that this work starts with ensuring municipalities are well positioned to support their residents.

Hundreds of municipal leaders from both urban and rural Alberta made it clear to our government, passing a resolution at the fall Alberta Municipalities conference last year that grants in place of taxes should be reinstated to 100 per cent. You know what, Mr. Speaker? Our government heard their call, and we are delivering. That's why through Budget 2025, if passed, our government will increase grants in place of taxes to 75 per cent this year and then to 100 per cent next year. This investment provides more than \$55 million this year and over \$75 million next year in discretionary grants to cover the cost of taxes that apply to eligible provincially owned property within a municipality.

In turn, these grants will provide municipalities from Calgary, Edmonton to Falher, to Milk River, and everywhere in between with a stable and reliable source of revenue that they can rely on while developing municipal budgets and allocating funding to municipal services and programs.

Mr. Speaker, this is just one piece of our government's investment in our communities that will help our municipal partners maintain and build the province's reputation as the best place to live, work, and raise a family.

Thank you.

United States Tariffs on Canadian Products

Ms Pancholi: When I was 19, my best friend and I moved to England for a gap year from university. Before I left, I got a maple leaf tattoo because I was so proud to be Canadian. Now, did I ever regret that bit of teenage impulsiveness? Well, we'll never know, but being proud of my country is not just permanently on my skin; it's also in my heart and in my DNA. For a couple of years the maple leaf was co-opted by some pretty selfish Canadians in a convoy, but we have taken our flag back, and once again it belongs to all of us.

Canada will never be the 51st state. As a country built on the foundation of treaty relationships with the Indigenous people who have been here since time immemorial, this is our home on native land. Canada is not for sale. Donald Trump and his administration are threatening our sovereignty. They're doing it openly, and every single Canadian must take this seriously.

The ridiculous will-they-or-won't-they tariffs are making a mockery of the economic security of both Canada and the United States. Let's make no mistake. These tariffs will wreak havoc on our jobs, our industries, and our way of life. They will threaten the prosperity we share and limit the opportunity for everyone to thrive in Alberta.

In this time of uncertainty we can find certainty in our commitment to stand up for our country and for each other. We can make a promise to spend our hard-earned money here on Canadian goods and the small businesses in our community and in our local economy. We can spend our time travelling and investing our tourist dollars here in Canada rather than travelling to Florida to support U.S. politicians who want to annex our country. We can cheer with the volume of an entire nation when the boys of Team Canada defeated the Americans. We can display and wave our flag with pride. We can support each other.

Remember that it's not just that I am Canadian; it's that we are Canadian. Canada is worth fighting for, and anyone who thinks otherwise has another thing coming. Elbows up, Canada. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Budget 2025

Mr. Boitchenko: Mr. Speaker, the members opposite have been highly critical of Budget 2025. They say it's full of cuts, and they are absolutely right. We have cut taxes for Albertans, making everyday life more affordable. I was thrilled to announce to my constituents last week that we have been working on cutting taxes. Budget 2025 introduces an 8 per cent tax rate on the first \$60,000 of income, saving families up to \$1,500 a year. Alberta already has the lowest taxes in the country, and we've cut them even further, making our province the best place to live, work, and do business. These cuts will attract even more jobs and investment into our province, now more than ever.

This budget adds over \$500 million to education this year, creating thousands of new student spaces and hiring more teachers and staff. We've committed \$28 billion to strengthen health care and grow the Alberta heritage savings trust fund to \$250 billion by 2050, securing prosperity for generations to come.

If the opposition is looking for someone to be angry at, they should turn their attention to themselves, Mr. Speaker, because Albertans want a government that stands up for their paycheques, strengthens services, and secures a prosperous future. That is exactly what the UCP is delivering.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I beg the indulgence of the Assembly. I know it happens on rare occasion, but the Speaker has made an error. [interjections] I know. My sincerest apologies. I neglected to introduce our anthem singer, so I'm going to take the occasion to do that.

1:50

Today we were led in the singing of our national anthem by Ms Sarah Wolfe. Sarah is a Métis Albertan who is a strong, fierce defender of her community who does incredible work in the lives of others. We are so proud and honoured to have you join us today as a wonderful advocate of Alberta's Métis Nation. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Statement by the Speaker

Rotation of Questions and Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'd like to inform you that there has been a slight modification of the Oral Question Period and Members' Statements rotation as a result of a recent change to the caucus composition in the Assembly. The Member for Lesser Slave Lake now sits as an independent and is entitled to one question per

week, starting with question 9 on day 4 of the Oral Question Period rotation, which is this Thursday, and one member's statement every three weeks, starting on day 92 of the projected sitting day calendar, which is March 26. As a result, the Members' Statements rotation has been reverted to a three-week rotation. This is week 1 of the Members' Statements rotation. Members will find a revised projected sitting day calendar and an Oral Question Period rotation on their desks.

Oral Question Period

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

Health Services Procurement Process

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, allegations of bloated contracts, kickbacks, harassment, shady land deals, political interference, and a gag order on fired public officials: this is the UCP's corrupt care scandal. The only way forward is with an official public inquiry, but instead we get a corrupt care cover-up, a dog-and-pony show carefully set up to only look at what the Premier will let them look at. A cabinet minister has resigned over it. The RCMP is now investigating. It's real. It's serious. How can the government not call a real public inquiry?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, thank you. This government takes these allegations incredibly seriously, and that's exactly why the Premier initially announced that she would work very closely with the Auditor General's office to make sure that everything that the Auditor General was doing or needing would be quickly delivered. It's also why we were pleased that the former Chief Justice of Manitoba's provincial court, Justice Wyant, is now leading an independent investigation into this matter as well. We're confident that the respect and integrity that Justice Wyant brings will uncover what we need to know.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the Premier's 'shamvestigation' is politically influenced and not independent. The 'shamvestigation' will only get access to the documents the government wants to share. We know there's more to this scandal than what happened at AHS. The government knows it, too; their own Minister of Infrastructure quit because of it. The sham will not get to the bottom of the corrupt care scandal. The problems are at the cabinet level, not at AHS. This sham will not clear the UCP government from the accusations of political interference and potential criminal activity. Why is the Premier so afraid of a real, fully independent, judicial-led public inquiry?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, all of that is absolute nonsense. Justice Wyant is operating independently of government to conduct a thorough investigation. He will deliver an interim report by May 30, 2025, so that all members of this Assembly can see what the recommendations and conclusions are. We are confident that the former Chief Justice of the provincial court of Manitoba has the integrity and the reputation to lead this investigation independently, and it is absolutely unconscionable that they would allege that it is a sham investigation.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, it is the government's integrity that is an absolute failure right now. Getting to the bottom of alleged kickbacks, illegal activity, bloated contracts should be a no-brainer. Instead, the UCP are more worried about carefully crafting their

cover-up and witch hunt for whistle-blowers. Alberta has had real public inquiries in the past. Premier Getty launched a public inquiry when seniors lost their retirement savings to shady investors. That inquiry took the time it needed and found that the government had failed Alberta's seniors. Is the Premier's reason for not calling a real public inquiry that she is worried that her cabinet has failed Albertans yet again? What secrets is she worried they'll still find?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, once again, this government takes these allegations very seriously, and that's why we're working with all of the legislative offices, the independent Auditor General, and an independent, judicial-led inquiry. We're working to make sure that all of the materials get forwarded to those independent investigations and those offices as quickly as possible, and we will continue to make sure that everything is transparent and that accountability is forefront in these investigations.

Member Irwin: Last week the RCMP confirmed that they are investigating the corrupt care scandal. The Premier refused to speak to local media about it. Instead, she went on far-right American radio to pander to Trump supporters and whine about wokeism. Wild. Could the Premier tell Albertans today: what contact has her office had with the RCMP about this investigation?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member ought to know that this government does not interfere with police investigations. We would absolutely not do that. [interjections] The opposition can laugh all they want. Again, a third-party investigation is taking place. It is led by the former Chief Justice of the provincial court of Manitoba, somebody that we believe has the integrity to conduct this investigation. The RCMP may be investigating, and certainly that is their prerogative, but we are not going to interfere with that investigation whatsoever.

Member Irwin: Well, the Minister of Justice should know that that's not a public inquiry.

The Premier's own hand-picked board of Alberta Health Services said to call in the RCMP back in December. A former minister of the government, Lyle Oberg, even sat on that board until the government fired him. Wow. You'd think that when a former member of cabinet says that the RCMP should be called in, the government would listen. Why didn't the Premier proactively hand over all relevant information to the RCMP in December, over three months ago, when the AHS board recommended she do so?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, the hon. opposition member knows full well that any inquiries related to an RCMP investigation need to be directed to the RCMP, not to this government. We don't direct the RCMP to open investigations. We don't direct the RCMP to conduct investigations. Certainly, it would be wholly inappropriate for government to make comments on an ongoing investigation by the RCMP. I'd suggest that that hon. member do the same.

Member Irwin: Well, let's hear from another former minister, this time the former Minister of Infrastructure. After resigning from cabinet he said, quote: what kind of person would I be if I'm willing to look the other way when I think something is offside? The UCP should have handed over all relevant information to the RCMP many months ago. Instead, they fired all the whistle-blowers. Yikes. Even the Deputy Minister of Finance said that she was hearing rumours of kickbacks. In case anyone is wondering, those are illegal. Why did the Premier not do the right thing and go straight to the RCMP?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, one of the first things that the Premier did was write to the Auditor General and encourage the Auditor General to expedite the investigation, committing that the Premier and this government would provide everything and full co-operation to make sure that took place. In addition to that, the Premier announced an independent inquiry, that is being now led by the former Chief Justice of the provincial court of Manitoba. The RCMP are investigating, and this government will continue to commit to provide everything necessary to fulfill that investigation and will co-operate fully in that regard.

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, this government has an obligation to uphold the principles of justice, including responding to the courts in a timely fashion. The government is being sued by the former CEO of Alberta Health, who filed her statement of claim on February 12. The government has not yet filed its statement of defence. Why is it that government has not filed its statement of defence?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, the Health minister has made it clear in this Assembly that the statement of defence is being prepared. There are certain time limits, that the hon. member knows full well about. We've not approached those timelines. We expect that the statement of defence will come very shortly in the coming days, and it will correct many of the allegations made.

2:00

Mr. Sabir: Allegations of kickbacks, bloated contracts, and wasted money deserve answers. The government has known all about the corrupt care scandal for months. The Premier admitted that her Health minister has been aware of this for over eight months. There is no excuse for legal delays when millions of dollars of Albertan money is at stake. Again, why is this government dithering on filing a statement of defence?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, once again, the hon. member knows that there are very strict timelines in filing a statement of defence. We've not approached those timelines. We are preparing that statement of defence, and it will be filed and served in the coming days, and we look forward to clarifying all of the allegations that were alleged in that claim.

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, the government has ground to a halt. No announcements are taking place without questions about the corrupt care scandal, and Albertans deserve answers now, not when it's convenient for the government. The former CEO was hand-picked by the Premier and then turfed. Albertans are on the hook for potentially millions of dollars as a result of this government's decision. The government knew why they fired her; why can't they explain it to the courts and Albertans? What's the delay?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, I could have sworn I answered this two prior times, but I'll answer it one more time. The statement of defence is forthcoming. It will be filed and served in just a matter of days. But this government is not going to sleep on all the other important announcements and things that need to take place. This government is here to lead Albertans, especially in light of the current events that are taking place, and we're going to do that.

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, last week the RCMP confirmed they've opened a criminal investigation into the allegations of political interference and the misuse of public funds to enrich friends of the UCP. Now, I know what the Minister of Health is going to say. She's going to read from her script and say that she can't comment on an ongoing police investigation, except she can. The Standing

Orders of this Chamber state that it's only when charges are laid that a member can't comment about a criminal matter. Well, charges haven't been laid yet, so will the minister confirm if has she been contacted by the RCMP for questioning yet, and if not, has she reached out herself to the RCMP?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, once again, we're not aware of any individual who is the subject of the RCMP's investigation, but that opposition member full well knows that this government will not comment on ongoing investigations, will not speak to an investigation that is taking place by the RCMP, and certainly we're not going to continue to go back and forth about an investigation. The RCMP is entitled to conduct an investigation independently of government, and that's the way it's going to stay.

Ms Pancholi: Well, Mr. Speaker, here's a tip. If a minister is so implicated in a scandal that she has to either hide behind a prepared statement or the Government House Leader or the Minister of Justice, then she is not fit to be a minister.

The minister must be disappointed that the RCMP are proceeding with an investigation. After all, she and the Premier allegedly fired the CEO and the entire board of AHS to avoid getting the RCMP involved. The nondisclosure agreements the minister has with former board members won't apply if they're questioned by the RCMP, but they still silence them from speaking freely in the Premier's 'shamvestigation', so will the minister release them from the gag orders?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, the RCMP announced that they are conducting an investigation, but we're unaware of what the subject of that investigation is or who is involved as a subject of the investigation. We will not comment on an ongoing RCMP investigation because we want to protect the integrity of the independence of the police. We have no interest nor will we continue to comment on what the RCMP is doing, and it would be wholly inappropriate for members of this side of the Assembly or members of that side of the Assembly to make comments that try to influence the outcome of the investigation.

Ms Pancholi: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice knows quite well that he can speak about RCMP investigations; they just choose not to because silence and hiding is what this government does. The Premier and minister are desperately trying to change the channel and pretend this is about resistance in AHS to implement their political direction around private surgical facilities, but in reality this is about the UCP's political direction to use public dollars to grossly overpay their friends. In fact, it was so bad that the board of AHS thought the RCMP needed to be involved months ago. Friend of the UCP Dr. Lyle Oberg and the Deputy Minister of Health were on that board. Let's see if the Minister of Health can answer a question today. How long before the Premier decided to fire the board was she told . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that the hon. member didn't get her words out, but I will say this once again. We are aware of an RCMP investigation.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Mr. Amery: We're not aware of who that individual subject is that's being investigated, but we will comply and co-operate fully with that RCMP investigation and provide whatever is requested of us.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, a point of order is noted at 2:05.

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction and his deputy minister have been named in the former AHS CEO's statement of claim. It states that the deputy minister contacted Athana Mentzelopoulos to tell her that the minister was "very concerned" about the internal investigations she was allegedly fired over. Now that there is an RCMP investigation, will the minister be honest with Albertans and explain why he was so concerned about investigations into illegal political interference that he had the deputy minister call the CEO?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I've been clear in this Chamber and I've been clear publicly that when I heard rumours of funds being used in an untoward manner, I did what any minister would do on either side of the aisle. I asked my department to clarify, and that was the purpose of it. If there is anything inappropriate, I want to find out, just as the rest of this government, which is why we are collaborating fully with the Auditor General in the independent report he's doing for the purpose of this Chamber, as is the Minister of Finance through the audit that is happening internally, as is the Premier and how she asked with the Minister of Health for an independent justice from Manitoba to have an independent inquiry into the process.

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, rumours abound in this province. What the province wants is answers and answers that will come from a full public inquiry which can subpoena witnesses and documents. Given that under the rules of the Legislature any minister can discuss matters under RCMP investigation unless there have been charges laid and given that no charges have been laid yet in the corrupt care scandal, to the minister. Please be specific about how they have helped the RCMP in their investigation. Who from his ministry has spoken to the RCMP, and what documents has he been requested to hand over so far?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung will certainly know what a preamble looks like. That sounded like one. I encourage him not to use one in his next set of questioning.

The hon. the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The truth is that this government wants answers as well, which is why we're fully transparent in our process, which is why we're collaborating fully. [interjections] Members opposite might chuckle. The truth is that this is a serious matter that we are taking seriously. The independent office of the Auditor General will continue their investigation, as will the independent and highly respected former justice from Manitoba who is looking into this. If there are any questions from the authorities, including the RCMP, my office and this government will collaborate fully with any questions they have.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister knows full well that the only way we're going to get full answers is from a full public inquiry where people can be testifying under oath and given that the Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction distributes hundreds of millions to private care providers to fund the Alberta recovery model and given that these funds are spent with little public oversight, no reporting on occupancy rates, resident outcomes, wait-lists, or professional standards, given that the Premier tried to push through an investigation where she controlled who and what was being investigated, will the minister suspend all

new contracts and grants until this ministry is clear about what's going on?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, for my part, I want to make sure there's transparency. I will collaborate with any of the above listed investigations, including the RCMP investigation. But what this government will not do is let individuals suffering from addiction die in intermittent homelessness, speedballing methamphetamine and fentanyl, where we take the opposition's policy, which is the same as they have in NDP Vancouver, where addictions run rampant on the streets, where there's no hope for those suffering from addiction. Instead, we will provide hope and health care for those suffering. That's what the Alberta model is. We will not allow members opposite to try and politicize the lives of those suffering from addiction.

Health System Reform

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, in November 2023 our government announced a transformation to Alberta's health care system. Through refocusing, four new provincial health agencies were unveiled: acute care, primary care, continuing care, and mental health and addiction. These organizations are created to bring more transparency, accountability, reliability, and better health care deliveries for all Albertans. To the Minister of Health: can you provide an update on the progress that has been made to Acute Care Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

2:10

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning our government did announce new details and investments for Acute Care Alberta specifically towards strengthening emergency health services, reducing emergency response times, and increasing EMS capacity. Through the transfer of EMS from AHS to Acute Care Alberta our government is focused on enhancing specialized care, increasing efficiency, and strengthening patient safety. Under the new refocused health care system emergency health services will be accountable for driving system improvements, meeting performance targets, and supporting workforce sustainability.

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

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that EMS is essential to Alberta's health care system and Albertans across the province rely on their life-saving services and further given that our government is undertaking a significant health care refocusing initiative to better support our service providers and Alberta's growing population, can the same minister explain how Budget 2025 provides support to Alberta's EMS? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government recognizes the importance of paramedics and EMS in Alberta. That is why we have increased EMS funding by \$58 million through Budget 2025 and, if passed, will also provide \$40 million towards a total of \$60 million over three years to maintain and replace EMS vehicles and equipment. This critical investment will ensure Albertans receive quick and reliable transportation and life-saving EMS care when and where they need it most and that staff are fully supported with the necessary equipment. This is critically important to us.

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

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for her answer. Given that EMS will be transferred from AHS to Acute Care Alberta to increase efficiency and strengthen patient safety and given that EMS will be provided with substantial investments and new, reliable equipment and vehicles and further given a new shared services entity will be established this summer to provide additional support to service providers, can the same minister explain what other additional supports will be provided?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. It's expected that the shared services entity will be stood up and operational by summer of 2025. This entity will be established to effectively provide support to Alberta's health care system, provincial health agencies, and service providers. It will assist with services such as information technology, finance and human resources, and centralized communications. We are making great progress in health care refocusing, and I'm excited to see more positive improvements to come. [interjections] Even though the members opposite don't want to hear it, things are improving in health care. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Health Services Procurement Process

(continued)

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, now that we know who the new Infrastructure minister is, Albertans deserve answers. The former Infrastructure minister resigned in disgust over the corrupt care scandal, warning of shady deals and political corruption. He called for an RCMP investigation, and now there is one. Will the new minister share his predecessor's moral compass and tell Albertans what corrupt and potentially criminal activities forced his predecessor to walk away?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, once again, from the moment that we learned of these allegations, this government took these allegations very seriously. We immediately announced that we would co-operate with all of the investigations that were taking place. The Ministry of Infrastructure is conducting its own review. That is appropriate due diligence. That's the proper thing to do. I look forward to hearing back from that investigation as well. Again, accountability and transparency are at the forefront of what this government is looking for.

Mr. Ip: Given that the former Infrastructure minister said that this government's dealings with Sam Mraiche required an RCMP investigation and given that he had to order an audit into a land deal where Sam Mraiche flipped a piece of property for a \$300,000 profit in a matter of months and given that the RCMP has confirmed they're investigating potential criminal activity into the corrupt care scandal and according to the rules ministers can comment on ongoing investigations unless they are personally charged, will the minister tell Albertans what information he or his staff turned over to the RCMP or are prepared to turn over?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Infrastructure is responsible for the acquisition, purchase, sale, leasing of lands all across this province. They acquired a piece of property adjacent to an existing one within the city of Edmonton tax valuation. To answer the hon. member's question, this government is going to fully co-operate with the RCMP investigation and provide any documents or materials that it is requested to do so.

Mr. Ip: Given that the new Infrastructure minister replaces a member who questioned how the UCP cabinet could look themselves in the mirror without a full investigation and given that before the RCMP investigation was announced, the Premier and Health minister tried to block transparency by launching a sham investigation with a restricted scope that controls what information will be looked at, will the minister not only commit to keeping this House informed of his role in the RCMP investigation but also support our call for a full public inquiry so Albertans can finally get answers?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, this Assembly and all Albertans know that there are now three investigations happening. The office of the Auditor General is conducting an independent investigation. Former Chief Justice Wyant of Manitoba's provincial court is conducting an independent investigation. The RCMP have announced that they are conducting an independent investigation. Justice Wyant's interim report will be tabled on alberta.ca on May 30, 2025, for everybody to read, and we're looking forward to seeing that.

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, the story of corrupt care continues to evolve for the worse. Now it's a new investigation, and this time it's led by the RCMP. The former Minister of Infrastructure expressed concerns regarding the government of Alberta's procurement practices across all departments. It raises big questions, particularly about which other ministers or ministries will be subject to an RCMP investigation. To the Minister of Justice: when did his ministry find out about this active RCMP investigation?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, we found out when the RCMP made the public announcement of that investigation. Once again, we immediately committed to working with the RCMP to provide them with any materials that they need to continue or conduct their investigation. We're not aware at this time of any one individual or what the subject of that investigation is about, but we've committed both on the record and off the record that we would comply and co-operate as thoroughly as possible.

Mr. Haji: Given that hundreds of staff are terminated, including many high-level staff, which would involve significant legal cost, the Minister of Justice would have had some knowledge of what was happening. Will the Minister of Justice tell this House what he knew about these bloated contracts and when?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, once again, as I mentioned – I think I've been very clear – the RCMP investigation was announced just days ago. We learned about it like everyone else. We do not collaborate or talk to the RCMP about the subject of their investigations, nor would it be appropriate to do so, so we learned like everyone else. But, once again, we'll fully co-operate with the RCMP investigation, provide whatever is requested of us. We want to get to the bottom of this, just like everyone else.

Mr. Haji: Given that the Premier claims she knew nothing about massive investigation of contracts of over \$600 million, given that the Minister of Justice must surely understand the significance of the matter and why the RCMP is now involved in this ongoing investigation – the Premier stated that they want to get to the bottom of the matter, and we all do – why is the Minister of Justice not supporting an independent, judicial-led public inquiry so Albertans can finally get answers to the corrupt care scandal?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, I support the investigations that are taking place. These are all independent investigations taking place

by a legislative office, in the Auditor General, by an independent former justice of the Manitoba provincial court, by the RCMP. All of those are taking place, all of those are independent, all of those will be made public, and we will get to the bottom of this.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore has a question to ask.

School Construction in Chestermere-Strathmore

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Chestermere is a rapidly growing community, with its population expanding by nearly 45 per cent between 2011 and 2021. It's also a very young and family-oriented community with a high proportion of children under 14 compared to the provincial average. These two factors have put substantial strain on the local school infrastructure. Through the school accelerator program our province has committed significant resources to address this pressure. To the Minister of Education: how will our province's recent generational investment in schools help accelerate the construction of much-needed schools in Chestermere?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

2:20

An Hon. Member: Hooray.

Mr. Nicolaidis: Thank you.

Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I get excited sometimes when there's a question, and I know other members do as well.

I want to thank the member for her important question. I know her community is an incredibly fast-growing community, and I thank her for noting the importance of the school construction accelerator program. Indeed, as the Premier announced, this \$8.6 billion investment is going to help us build schools in our fastest growing communities. Over the course of the next few years we aim to build over 90 new schools, modernize and replace 24 schools, add more spaces to the modular program, and help accommodate over 200,000 spaces in the entire province, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that in Budget 2023 Golden Hills school division received planning funding for the replacement of Westmount school and given that Westmount school serves a critical purpose in the town of Strathmore and is now 55 years old, further given that my neighbours in Strathmore are anxiously awaiting updates on the development for new spaces for their children, can the same minister explain how the school accelerator program will move projects like this from planning to completion?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaidis: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, as I mentioned, one of the important components of the school construction accelerator program is the addition of significant spaces across the province. One of the other critical components of the program is how we are going to move school projects forward. We have the three stages that a school project must move through: planning, design, and construction. In the past the project has only been able to move forward at the annual budget cycle. However, under the new program the school project will be able to move forward through those stages whenever it's ready.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that modular classrooms are an effective way to provide student spaces in overutilized schools while new construction is under way and given that in November Rocky View school submitted a request for new modulars at Rainbow Creek and Prairie Waters elementaries and further given the capital requests for Strathmore schools Trinity Christian academy and Strathmore high school for modular classrooms, to the same minister: what new modular facilities can my neighbours expect to be available in 2025, and how will these alleviate the pressures these schools are facing?

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjections]

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again for the cheers from the members opposite. I'm really excited that they're happy with the work that we're doing.

You know, Mr. Speaker, under Budget '25 we're also investing \$50 million over the course of the next three years to expand our modular classroom program. Of course, as I think anyone can understand, building new schools takes some time, but we need to take measures immediately to create additional spaces, and that's where the modular program can come in. We hope to have some more information for the residents of Chestermere and other Albertans in the coming months.

Health Services Procurement Process (continued)

Mr. Ellingson: Last week Albertans learned that the RCMP would be opening up an investigation into this government's allegedly corrupt procurement practices. In the former AHS CEO's statement of claim we found out that the Deputy Minister of Finance was aware of internal investigations into kickbacks. Will the Minister of Finance finally come clean to Albertans about what he knew regarding investigations into corruption within this government and when he knew it?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I've already answered this question, but I'm happy to again. I did reach out to my deputy after we saw her statements present. She made it clear to me that she ran into the former CEO of AHS in a social setting. She had heard a rumour in the civil service that there were internal investigations within AHS. She reached out and asked if there were any improprieties that we should know about as the Treasury Board and Finance team. No information was shared. I was not aware of this until I asked my deputy.

Mr. Ellingson: So apparently social conversations now clarify all allegations of corruption.

Given that the standing orders permit members to address issues under criminal investigation so long as no charges have been made and given that no charges have been laid in this matter, will the minister finally be honest with Albertans and specifically address what he knew about the corrupt care scandal as it was in the making?

The Speaker: If the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills would like to use a preamble, he's going to need to do it in the first four questions.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, the hon. members of the opposition need to take yes for an answer. We've said this repeatedly. We will co-operate with any and all RCMP investigations, Auditor General

investigations, independent third-party investigations, and we will work to make sure that all of the relevant materials are sent to those respective offices so that they can conduct their reviews and their investigations and provide feedback following which. I don't know what else to tell this hon. member except that this government will not comment on ongoing RCMP investigations, full stop.

Mr. Ellingson: Given that I should use "given," I'll ask one more time: given that the RCMP has launched a criminal investigation into government corruption and given the fact that knowledge of investigations into corruption was so widespread such that they were conceivably known by the minister himself, will the Minister of Finance be willing to now offer before this House his unmitigated willingness to co-operate with the RCMP investigation? Has he already been contacted to do so?

The Speaker: A gold star to the member.

The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that I have already answered this question multiple times and given that I will answer it one more time for the hon. member, the answer to his question is yes. This government will comply and co-operate and do everything necessary to work with the RCMP to make sure that the materials that they need, that the information that they need is sent to them when and if it is requested from us.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed has a question to ask.

COVID-19 Pandemic Data Review Task Force Report

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In November of 2022 the Premier requested that a COVID-19 task force, including health care professionals, academics, researchers, and advisers, led by Dr. Gary Davidson be established under the Health Quality Council of Alberta to review data related to Alberta's pandemic response. The panel would examine the quality, use, interpretation, and flow of information that informed our government on the response. To the Minister of Health: can you please share with this Chamber why this task force was necessary?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The task force was designed to include health professionals from diverse practice areas, including infectious disease, public health, general practice, acute care, immunology, analytics, and emergency medicine. Their recommendations offer a perspective on how the government can better position itself to protect the health and safety of Albertans in the future. This review builds on efforts to respond to future public health emergencies while safeguarding the rights of Albertans and ensuring that public health measures are applied in urgent and temporary situations.

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

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for her answer. Given that this extensive report was asked for by many Albertans who wanted a stronger understanding of the reasons behind the government's pandemic response and further given that the pandemic response significantly impacted many Albertans, including my constituents in Calgary-Lougheed, justifying the need for this report, can the same minister please describe some of the key recommendations and takeaways from this report?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member. The task force examined the quality, use, interpretation, and flow of information and data that informed Alberta's COVID-19 pandemic response. The task force also developed 45 recommendations, including establishing clear guidelines and procedures for evaluating the quality, relevance, and credibility of data sources and references used in public communications as well as safeguarding the individual rights of Albertans to make informed decisions. Our government will continue to review the report and its recommendations and will use them appropriately.

Mr. Bouchard: Given that a new study from Yale University shows that there are serious issues with the mRNA vaccine and further given that numerous Nordic countries are only allowing the shot to those under 50 if they've discussed it already with their health care practitioner and also given that the Governor of Florida has recently called on the CDC to stop recommending the shot for children, can the same minister please share what else the government of Alberta has done to enhance the ability of our province to respond to future public emergencies while ensuring that the rights of all Albertans are safeguarded? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.
The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. This review builds on efforts already taken to enhance Alberta's ability to respond to future public emergencies while protecting the rights and safety of Albertans. These actions include the introduction of amendments to the Alberta Bill of Rights, amendments to the Public Health Act, and an ongoing review of regulated professions in the province. We are committed to ensuring responsible decisions are made to prioritize the health and well-being of all Albertans, and we will continue to protect their rights.

2:30 Health Services Procurement Process (continued)

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, for weeks we in the opposition and Albertans across the province have been calling for a public inquiry into the corrupt care scandal, the most troubling set of allegations ever made against an Alberta government. A judge-led public inquiry would be fully independent, able to compel testimony and subpoena documents to fully investigate disturbing allegations of political interference. It could examine systemic issues as allegations extend across this government, affecting far more than just one ministry or public body. And a public inquiry would report directly to the public. To the Minister of Justice: why won't he call a public inquiry?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, do you know what else is an independent investigation? The RCMP investigation, the Auditor General investigation, the judicial-led independent investigation. We have a multitude of investigations taking place, and we're confident that all of them will yield the results and the answers that this Assembly and Albertans need and deserve.

Mr. Shepherd: Given that the UCP's 'shamvestigation' has been given an extremely limited scope by the same Premier and government that it's investigating and given that they're only allowing it to look at the process of procurement, not the significant and disturbing allegations of direct political interference to give overpriced contracts in multiple ministries to friends of the UCP,

and given that they're then requiring the judge to report directly to the same Premier whose staff are alleged to have interfered and given it's clear there's no independence or transparency in this 'shamvestigation,' will the Minister of Justice drop the sham and call an actual independent, judge-led public inquiry?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, I have faith and integrity in Justice Wyant. He has led Manitoba's Provincial Court with integrity. His reputation is beyond reproach, and I believe that he will lead an independent investigation that will yield information that all Albertans deserve to know. He will deliver an interim report on May 30, 2025, and that will be posted online for all Albertans to see. We're confident that the investigation, that the processes, and that the results will yield the information that we'd like to see.

Mr. Shepherd: Given that we have no faith in the integrity of the UCP, who have a long record of undemocratic political interference, like their previous Minister of Justice calling the chief of police to contest his own traffic ticket or given that the Premier herself called their next Minister of Justice in a blatant attempt to interfere in the outcome of a criminal case, and given that the current Minister of Justice decided that was only worth a light slap on the wrist and given that minister is alleged to have his own connection to the individual at the heart of the corrupt care scandal, it's clear Albertans can't trust the UCP to simply tell the truth, let alone investigate themselves. Will the Minister of Justice do the right thing and call a public inquiry today?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, the investigations that are taking place are going to be thorough, they're going to be complete, and they are being led by independent offices. Here's what we're not going to do. We're not going to let that member or the NDP put ideology before the health and the safety of Albertans. We're not going to close publicly funded clinics. We're not going to cancel tens of thousands of surgeries. We're not going to take advice from the socialists on the other side of this aisle in how to lead this province.

Budget 2025

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: This UCP government kicked out the Member for Lesser Slave Lake simply for standing up for his constituents, something every MLA is elected to do. He called out the UCP budget for doing little to nothing for rural Alberta while racking up a \$5 billion deficit. He's right. It's chaos, corruption, and cuts. Can the Minister of Finance explain to the constituents of Lesser Slave Lake why even he didn't listen to the UCP member or to the concerns about this disastrous budget?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, it's pretty rich to hear the words "disastrous budget" come out of Alberta's NDP. I will be the first to say that I wish this budget didn't have a negative sign in front of the \$5.2 billion. Absolutely. But Alberta, leading the way before any other province had put their budgets forward, brought the tariff risk into our budget, into our baseline. B.C. didn't do that. B.C. put an addendum to the side. Four point four per cent population growth, and we're going to continue to build this province while weathering this storm. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Given that the Member for Lesser Slave Lake was looking for funding for critical infrastructure that will help improve their crumbling health care, out of the budgeted \$5 billion deficit, given that he said, "Healthcare in northern Alberta has hit rock bottom. How are we expected to accept multiple

emergency department closures when the nearest care is hours away?”, will the Minister of Finance explain to northern Albertans why his budget does not fund health care in their home communities as the local MLA has appropriately called out?

Mr. Horner: I'd be happy to speak to some of the investments this government has made in Budget '25 in northern Alberta, as I would for any sitting MLA here that has concerns. This budget is about all of the province: Edmonton, Calgary, and everywhere else, corner to corner. Northern Alberta: \$225 million over three years for school projects across Alberta, including planning and design for five new school projects in the north; \$101 million for highway 63 twinning north of Fort Mac; \$87 million for the bridge in La Crête; \$80 million for the La Crête maternity and community health centre; \$189 million for a replacement bridge in Beaverlodge. On and on.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Given that the Member for Lesser Slave Lake was looking for his constituency's fair share in critical infrastructure projects, given that he said, “I would expect to see real investment in one-time infrastructure projects for northern Alberta – fixing our roads, bridges, building new schools, and upgrading regional airports,” will the Minister of Finance explain to northern Albertans why none of the critical rural projects were funded even with their \$5 billion deficit?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I would like to say something that's unparliamentary about what just was said there because it's absolute garbage that these things weren't funded in that riding. Two schools, two road projects, an EMS facility in that specific riding, and I don't even like getting down into the riding level. I'm from the remote rural part of the world as well, if any of you aren't aware. Sometimes things have to go in priority lists. Transportation itself: I think they're managing 161 different road projects across the province. We're dealing with design and planning to make sure that they're priorities of this budget and the next budget.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Agribusiness Industry Development

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recent escalations in trade tension between Canada and the United States have highlighted the risk of overreliance on trading with the United States. Alberta imports high volumes of agricultural products from the United States. There is an opportunity to expand domestic production, strengthen our manufacturing sector, and create jobs right here in our province. To the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation: how is Alberta looking to overcome these trade challenges to enhance food security, expand our agricultural sector, and boost domestic manufacturing?

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

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for an excellent question. The recent trade tensions have exposed that one area where we can ensure growth and enhance food security is to work together as provinces to remove trade barriers within our own country. This government has been leading the country on removal of our own trade barriers and working to improve interprovincial collaboration through initiatives like the Lloydminster pilot. There's no better time than now for our provinces and our country to come together and support each other through more domestic trade.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta has world-class agricultural resources and a growing food-processing industry and given that increased local production could reduce import dependence and make food more affordable for Albertans and further given that strategic investments in agritech, irrigation, and value-added processing can strengthen our economy and create new jobs, can the same minister please outline which steps the government is taking to grow Alberta's agriculture and food-processing industries?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member. Our government works hard to expand and build programs that help drive more local production right here in Alberta. Whether it be the made-in-Alberta labelling program or Leduc agri-processing hub and bioprocessing facility, we have been working with Alberta-born companies for decades to assist them to span the gap to commercialization for their products. In addition, we provide investment and export services for the agricultural sector through our AgriInvest department.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta's economic diversification depends on the expansion of our manufacturing sector and given that increasing provincial processing and production capacity can strengthen supply chains and reduce costs for Albertans and further given that Alberta's growing population requires new opportunities in manufacturing, technology, and skilled trades, can the same minister explain how the government is working with industry and investors to develop Alberta's manufacturing capacity and create well-paying jobs for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Agriculture and food processing contributes billions to our economy, so we are continually working to build ways to strengthen the sector. That's why this government launched Alberta's agriprocessing investment tax credit program, a program that has made Alberta a beacon for investments like the Little Potato Company, Dairy Innovation West, or Canary Biofuels. Programs like this are making a huge difference in building Alberta's agrifood sector.

Health Services Procurement Process

(continued)

Member Miyashiro: Mr. Speaker, now that the RCMP has launched an investigation into the corrupt care scandal, there are at least four active investigations on this issue: the Auditor General looking into procurement issues, AHS internal, independent investigation by this government about themselves, and the aforementioned RCMP probe. The problem with all these is that none of them are public and three of them are reporting directly to the government. When is this government going to order a public inquiry into this mess, and when is the Minister of Health going to step aside while there are active investigations for a department under her control?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I actually failed to do this last time I rose in answer to a question from the Member for Lethbridge-West, but I'd like to welcome him to the Chamber after his recent election.

In answer to the question, I know the member is new, but I will tell the member what I have said already, before: the Minister of Health is not going anywhere. This government is undertaking a significant review on Alberta's health care system to make sure we refocus it, to make sure Albertans get the health care that they deserve and that they pay for. I support the Premier one hundred per cent in this effort, and I support the Minister of Health.

Member Miyashiro: Mr. Speaker, given that it's clear that the Premier does not have the confidence of all of the UC MLAs in the manner in which the corrupt care scandal has been dealt with, again I ask: when is this government going to order a public inquiry so that everything is laid bare for the people of Alberta, so the government cannot hide behind official-sounding processes, so the people of Alberta have a full understanding of how \$600 million of taxpayer money was spent on private, for-profit surgical facilities?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, I too would like to welcome the hon. member. I understand he is new, but he actually understands this process better than anyone. He mentioned four independent investigations that are taking place. We have faith in the process; we know that it's going to yield the results and the answers that we're all looking for, and we're very much awaiting the answers and the results of those investigations. So kudos to the hon. member for being the only member of the opposition who was able to identify four independent investigations that are taking place. We're very proud of that member. It's warm and cozy over here, my friend. Come on over. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Member Miyashiro: Well, Mr. Speaker, given recent budget allocations for Lethbridge, including items that had been previously approved like renal services, the rural medical program at the University of Lethbridge, and, once again, the cardiac catheter facility at Chinook regional hospital, which was an election promise in 2019 and 2023 and for which work has yet to begin . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Member Miyashiro: . . . can the minister explain how overpaying private facilities embroiled in the corrupt care scandal has left constituents in Lethbridge with woefully inadequate primary care and unacceptable levels of care for women's health?

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:44.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I can tell the hon. member that, in fact, we will be building a cardiac catheterization facility in Lethbridge. In fact, there were planning dollars allocated. I'm looking forward to sharing that with all of the citizens of Lethbridge. We will continue to make sure that we provide services where they're needed most. I know Lethbridge does need cardiac catheterization, and we will make sure that actually gets done.

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

Members' Statements

(continued)

Budget 2025

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Mr. Speaker, ethical, competent government listens to the voices of all Albertans. It seems that every week there's a new unveiling that the government caucus is held together with mere threads. The MLA for Lesser Slave Lake spoke out against this government's budget just a few days after it was released. He said, "it certainly isn't for me, my family, my friends, or my constituents." Those are the member's own words. But on Friday afternoon, after representing his constituents, he was officially kicked out of caucus. Instead of listening to a rural, Indigenous member of their own team, they shut him out. Instead of listening to the Member for Lesser Slave Lake about his constituents' concerns for better health care, better infrastructure so rural Albertans can get treatment close to home, or finishing critical roadways like highway 88 so Albertans can travel safely, they fired him from their own team.

Rural Albertans and Indigenous communities expect better. But instead of being focused on them, the Premier is more preoccupied with extremists down south. You have to wonder which team she's playing for because it clearly is not team Alberta. The budget continues to ignore everyday Albertans, not accounting for the future of generations to come. Instead, it's full of cuts, chaos, and corruption. It is disappointing but not surprising, and the members know that, too.

This government is focused on making their friends wealthy and happy rather than supporting everyday Albertans. On this side of the House we will make sure that we hear what Albertans say are their priorities. We will prioritize good jobs, good health care, and the necessary infrastructure to build a prosperous Alberta for everyone. We stand with Nenshi, and we will continue fighting because a better Alberta is possible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

International Women's Day

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise as a southern, rural MLA in this Chamber to recognize and continue the celebration of the 114th International Women's Day, which took place on March 8, as a day to celebrate the collective achievements of women in Alberta and across the world. This year's theme was Accelerate Action, emphasizing the importance of taking swift and decisive steps to achieve gender equality. We do that by celebrating, respecting, and empowering women every day, by championing women role models and leaders in our communities, present and past, Alberta women like the Famous Five, who stood before the Supreme Court of Canada so women would be considered as persons in the Constitution, and by creating opportunities and removing barriers so women can achieve their greatest potential.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta dream serves as an equal opportunity for everyone to succeed. Our government has committed to this dream, empowering females to succeed in fulfilling careers of their choice. Our Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women has done excellent work to uphold this, including supports, which include STEM and Persons Case scholarships. Furthermore, the minister has set new standards on a national scale for championing of women by launching the new Women in Technical and Applied Arts scholarship, the first and only provincially funded scholarship of its kind in Canada.

Our government recognizes that there's still work to be done, including to protect women from all forms of aggression. I'm honoured to be part of a government that takes action, and I applaud the collective work of my colleagues in developing Alberta's 10-year strategy to end gender-based violence.

Alberta women bring invaluable strength and dedication to our communities and economy. When they have the opportunity to fully participate in our economy, Alberta thrives. By empowering females, Alberta continues to help create an equal and better future for women and girls, ensuring our province is the best place to live, work, and raise a family.

Happy International Women's Day. Thank you.

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

2:50

Ramadan

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today to recognize the holy month of Ramadan, which began last week. Ramadan is a sacred time for the Muslim umma world-wide marked by a month-long period of fasting. From dawn until sunset Muslims abstain from food and drink, instead focusing on strengthening their relationship with the creator and his creation. This practice is not only an act of devotion but also a profound exercise in spiritual discipline, self-restraint, self-reflection, and humility. Fasting as a tradition is shared among all Abrahamic faiths, a reminder of our common and shared values and humanity.

Beyond prayer, Ramadan calls upon us to extend kindness to those in need, to reach out to the less fortunate, the sick, the elderly, and those struggling to make ends meet. At its core it embodies the values of faith, kindness, compassion, generosity, empathy, and hope. These are also Alberta values that bind us all as neighbours and as a community. Yet we know that not all neighbours share the same opportunities. Many of them feel excluded. Many lack access to basic needs, housing, clean water, education, employment, and health care. Today, as we witness a troubling rise in divisive rhetoric and attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion, it is more important than ever that we stand firm in our shared values and shared humanity. Let's stand together for our neighbours and for a society where everyone can live a life of dignity, purpose, and hope.

With that, I extend my best wishes for a blessed and meaningful Ramadan to all observing here in Alberta and across the world. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill 40, the Professional Governance Act, sponsored by the Minister of Advanced Education, and Bill 41, the Wildlife Amendment Act, 2025, sponsored by the Minister of Forestry and Parks.

I also rise to give oral notice of Government Motion 61, which reads as follows:

Be it resolved that the membership of the Assembly's committees be replaced as follows:

- (a) on the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices that Mr. Cyr replace Mr. Sinclair;
- (b) on the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing that Mr. Wiebe replace Hon. Mr. Long as deputy chair, and that Mr. Sinclair replace Hon. Mr. Long;
- (c) on the Standing Committee on Members' Services that Mrs. Petrovic replace Hon. Mr. Long;

- (d) on the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future that Mr. Cyr replace Mr. Sinclair; and
- (e) on the Standing Committee on Families and Communities that Mrs. Johnson replace Hon. Mr. Long.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 39

Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 39, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of the bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, last week I proudly stood to introduce Budget 2025, a budget of tough but measured choices to meet the needs of Albertans and maintain the Alberta advantage. Bill 39, which I'm pleased to introduce today, reflects our commitment to meeting the challenge Alberta faces today by proposing to implement key policies I outlined in my Budget Address.

The legislative amendments contained within Bill 39 would allow us to move forward with some of the most important components of Budget 2025. That includes updates to the fiscal rules to give government the flexibility to use surplus cash to improve its net financial position, amendments to allow for the new 8 per cent tax bracket, and amendments to double the statutory contribution to Legal Aid Alberta to 50 per cent from 25 per cent.

As the government faces an uncertain economic picture, particularly when you throw in U.S. tariffs, increased protectionism, and an upcoming federal election, we're meeting the challenge with a prudent financial plan. I'm pleased to move first reading of Bill 39, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2025.

[Motion carried; Bill 39 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there tablings? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with the five requisite copies of a number of tablings. One is a *Washington Post* article highlighting that Canada's superlabs pose a new threat for the U.S. opioid epidemic.

Another one is an *Edmonton Journal* article where the fentanyl merchant of death was sentenced to 16 years, but it also highlights the account that in this bust alone there were 15 million lethal doses apprehended.

The last one is a Bureau article showcasing that a Chinese narco suspect was caught in private meetings with Prime Minister Trudeau. This individual is currently being investigated by multiple law enforcement agencies across the world, with links to Panama, Caribbean, Mexico as well as other police sources.

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to table the requisite five copies of three of the dozens of e-mails I received in recent days from Albertans who, amongst other things, demand that the transportation minister ditch his crayon-drawn line for the green line and fund the well-researched underground city plan.

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

Ms Chapman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of an e-mail from Rebecca, one of many Alberta moms whose kids aren't able to access school properly due to the EA strike, one of many who have not received a response from the Education minister.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, looking at the clock, it strikes me that I should probably move, pursuant to Standing Order 7(8), that the daily Routine may continue past 3 p.m.

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table five copies of a letter from Leah McNally. She lives in Edmonton-Decore, and she's really, really concerned about the current strikes of education support workers who are not showing up to schools.

The Speaker: Are there others?
Seeing none, the Clerk.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of Hon. Mr. Horner, President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, errata for pages 1 and 3 of the 2025-26 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates general revenue fund, tabled on February 27, 2025; pursuant to the Insurance Act, Automobile Insurance Rate Board 2024 Annual Report; pursuant to the provincial judges and applications judges registered and unregistered pensions plans regulation, provincial judges and applications judges registered and unregistered pension plans 2023-2024 Annual Report.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that brings us to points of order, and at 2:05 the hon. the Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Gestures

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At 2:05 p.m. the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud stood up and began her question as follows, "Let's see if the Minister of Health can answer a question today: how long before the Premier . . ." fired the board and so on and so forth and then began flapping her arms like a chicken. The *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 617, gives us direction here. "Speakers have consistently ruled that visual displays or demonstrations of any kind used by Members to illustrate their remarks or emphasize their positions are [completely] out of order." You cannot do, as you have mentioned many times before, indirectly what cannot be done directly. The implications of flapping her arms like a chicken and encouraging the Minister of Health to answer a question is not only wholly inappropriate for this Assembly, but it's plain childish. It's inappropriate, and it demonstrates a pattern, if you will, of bullying members; in particular, the Minister of Health.

I want to bring you just a little bit closer to an Alberta ruling that might be relevant to this particular situation. On April 27, 2011, at page 890 of *Hansard*, a member, who will remain unnamed: "We chased you out of the province. That's why. Because you're chicken." The Speaker says, "Okay. Please . . . I heard that. You're going to apologize right now for that remark. Stand up and do it."

Mr. Speaker, the point is this: whether it's a gesture, which we've established has been ruled to be inappropriate and akin to using

offensive language or whether it's that language itself, calling somebody a chicken or implying that somebody is a chicken is absolutely inappropriate for this Assembly, and I would ask that that member stand up and apologize.

3:00

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

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Minister of Justice for the point of order argument. If there were gestures, if the word "chicken" was used, I agree that would be unparliamentary. However, the minister also referred to bullying in his comments, and I must object because certainly no member of the Official Opposition would engage in behaviour like that. With that being said, I am going to allow the member to speak for themselves.

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I offer my apology and withdraw for making a chicken-flapping-wings motion at the minister for refusing to answer questions from the Official Opposition while also taking questions from government backbenchers. I apologize and withdraw for that, Minister.

The Speaker: I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.
Hon. members, at 2:55 . . .

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker. I do rise, if I may.

The Speaker: Yeah. I just was trying to determine the time, but it was your point of order that you rose on close to the end of question period.

Point of Clarification

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, actually, I do rise on a matter prior to the point of order, if I may. I do rise on 13(2). I am not standing to challenge the Speaker's ruling but to ask the Speaker in future rulings to give consideration to the nature of apologies. You have ruled on many occasions that you do not question the sincerity of an apology.

The Speaker: No. If you want to have a conversation about changing the structure around apologies, we can do so with the benefit of all of the House leadership in my office at another time. We're not going to have a public discussion around whether or not apologies should or shouldn't be accepted, but I thank you for your intervention.

Do you have another point of order that you would like to raise?

Mr. Schow: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, I was going to rise on a point of order at the time noted. Given that the Member for Lethbridge-West is new, just the nature of the questions, the second supplemental and the first supplemental in the initial question were not related. However, given that it is the member's second week on the job, I will give a pass and withdraw because I'm such a nice guy.

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

Orders of the Day

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I do rise to ask the House for unanimous consent to move Government Motion 61, which I have

read already into the record and given oral notice of. Do you want me to reread that motion, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Yes. I think that you should.

Mr. Schow: Certainly. I'm happy to reread that motion, and it reads as follows:

Be it resolved that the membership of the Assembly's committees be replaced as follows:

- (a) on the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices that Mr. Cyr replace Mr. Sinclair;
- (b) on the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing that Mr. Wiebe replace Hon. Mr. Long as deputy chair and that Mr. Sinclair replace Hon. Mr. Long;
- (c) on the Standing Committee on Members' Services that Mrs. Petrovic replace Hon. Mr. Long;
- (d) on the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future that Mr. Cyr replace Mr. Sinclair; and
- (e) on the Standing Committee on Families and Communities that Mrs. Johnson replace Hon. Mr. Long.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a request for unanimous consent to proceed immediately to Government Motion 61.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: We'll proceed immediately to the motion.

Government Motions

Committee Membership Changes

61.

Mr. Schow moved:

Be it resolved that the membership of the Assembly's committees be replaced as follows:

- (a) on the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices that Mr. Cyr replace Mr. Sinclair;
- (b) on the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing that Mr. Wiebe replace Hon. Mr. Long as deputy chair and that Mr. Sinclair replace Hon. Mr. Long;
- (c) on the Standing Committee on Members' Services that Mrs. Petrovic replace Hon. Mr. Long;
- (d) on the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future that Mr. Cyr replace Mr. Sinclair; and
- (e) on the Standing Committee on Families and Communities that Mrs. Johnson replace Hon. Mr. Long.

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader, I don't need you to read it for a third time, but if you want to move the motion, that would be excellent.

Mr. Schow: Yes, Mr. Speaker. It doesn't need to be read again, as much as I like to use members' names in this Chamber. I think that these are important committee changes given recent events.

The Speaker: Now, hon. members, this is a debatable motion. Is there anyone wishing to join in the debate?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Government Motion 61 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, I rise to seek unanimous consent of this Assembly to transfer sponsorship of Bill 214, Eastern Slopes Protection Act, to the Member for Lethbridge-West.

The Speaker: Hon. members, for the sake of clarity, this is a request for unanimous consent to transfer a private member's bill previously in another member's name who is no longer a member of the Assembly. There will be no debate on the matter as it's just a request for unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Motions for Returns

Basic Minimum Wage

M10. Ms Wright moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a list showing the number of Albertans, organized by year, paid the basic minimum wage described in section 9(1)(a.1) of the employment standards regulation, Alta. reg. 14/1997, during the period from June 26, 2019, to March 31, 2024.

[Debate adjourned November 25: Mr. Getson speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. members, before the Assembly is Motion for a Return 10. The Hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland does have a number of moments remaining.

Is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has the call.

Member Haji: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Motion for a Return 10. Albertans work hard to support themselves and their families, yet many Albertans are struggling to keep up with the rising costs. Transparency from this government is essential to ensure fair wages, but the UCP stopped on the number of Albertans earning minimum wage. For the purpose of planning, for the purpose of supporting, for the purpose of understanding, how many Albertans are facing affordability crises, particularly those who are making minimum wage, is really unknown, which is concerning. It was only after we brought forward a motion that the government finally released the reports for the last two years. If this information was readily available, why did it take so long and so much pressure for this government to make such information available?

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Instead of taking steps to make life more affordable, Albertans continue to have the lowest minimum wage in the country. Not only that, they continue to have the highest inflation rate in the country, and not only that, they continue to face affordability challenges for various reasons. Instead of taking steps to make life more affordable, many hard-working Albertans are being left behind as wages fail to keep up with the cost of living.

Mr. Speaker, during the constituency break, it is a time that we go back and talk to our constituents and figure out, understand so that we can well represent them in the House. Their stories are so important for our policy-making, and their stories are so informative for policy-making. Not only that, but we have the obligations to bring those stories to this Chamber so that the policy decisions that we make are reflective of those stories.

Last week I met a constituent of mine. I will call him Farah. He's an Uber driver, typically makes between \$15 and \$20 per hour. Assuming an average hourly rate of \$18 and a full-time schedule of 40 hours per week, let's say that Farah makes an annual income of approximately \$37,000. He is a father of three. Inflation in Alberta has risen faster than the national average, and unemployment is very high, especially in this part of the country.

3:10

Madam Speaker, because of such an employment level Farah cannot find a well-paying job. That means Farah and his family are struggling to pay the rent, they're struggling to make ends meet, they cannot afford essentials, and Farah is left to only keep his family by driving Uber. He was hoping this government will come up with a plan to help Albertans out of the current affordability crisis.

I went back home, and I looked into and reflected on the story that he shared with me. I thought about his family. I thought about Farah's situation, Madam Speaker, and I think of this government's plans. I reflected on the budget that was tabled. I thought about this government's affordability plan. I didn't share at the time when I was having the conversation with Farah, but upon reflecting, I also thought about this government's plans to increase auto insurance fees. This government plans to increase vehicle registration fees. That's additional information that Farah is still not aware of. That's how this government would be helping Farah to get out of his affordability crisis.

People are working full-time. They should be able to afford a decent quality of life, particularly in our province, such a rich province. Workers deserve livable wages. We should not be debating today why we can't report the number of Albertans who are making minimum wage. Madam Speaker, it is unfortunate. Across the country the lowest paid Canadians live in Alberta. Think about that. If you have the lowest minimum wage, what that means is that the lowest paid workers across the country call Alberta home.

It shouldn't take opposition pressure for the government to provide basic transparency, particularly when it is impacting those who are in a precarious situation, those who are in situations where they cannot make ends meet, those who will be impacted the most when inflation hits, those who will be impacted the most when the cost of living is unaffordable. The UCP's sporadic suggestions suggest an effort to keep Albertans in the dark. This sporadic reporting suggests the inability to plan. It suggests that it doesn't reflect how the government will address the challenges through this long-term fiscal plan.

Given these reporting gaps, Madam Speaker, it's only fair to request a complete breakdown over the entire period. Albertans deserve the full picture, not a selective reporting that does not provide the fulsome picture of the situation. By failing to raise wages or address cost-of-living challenges, the government is neglecting the very people who power our economy. A strong workforce means a strong Alberta.

The government's strategic plan outlines investment in the workforce, and the key signature of workforce investment in the government's strategic plan is those who work in child care centres or child care workers. Let's look at the story of Halima. She lives in Edmonton. She's a single mother with three children. Halima works in a daycare. She's a level 1 and makes \$17 per hour. She makes annually \$35,000. Let's not forget the cost of living, and let's not forget that child care workers are the key signature of this government's workforce investment plans.

The reason why I'm using these stories, Madam Speaker: these are not the stories of numbers; these are the stories of those who sent us to represent in this House. Albertans deserve honesty and fairness. Albertans deserve a livable wage. Albertans deserve at least a minimum wage that is not the lowest in the country. They deserve a government that acknowledges these real struggles, a government that documents, a government that reports, a government that shares that information for planning purposes so that Albertans' future is not thrown in a very difficult situation. Every worker should have the dignity of earning a wage that allows them to build a stable and fulfilling life.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there other members that wish to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-North East.

Member Brar: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Let me ask this Assembly one simple question. If you work full-time, should you be able to afford rent, groceries, and a decent life? Of course. Yet in Alberta today that is not reality. Why? Because this government has left over 100,000 workers stuck at a wage that hasn't moved in six years while the cost of living has skyrocketed. This motion addresses a pressing truth that every member of the Assembly needs to confront: the UCP government's failure to even report how many Albertans earn minimum wage until they were pressured to do so and the broader economic mismanagement that has left working Albertans worse off.

This issue is not just about numbers on a page; it's about families in our communities struggling to get by, about the erosion of the Alberta advantage that once promised prosperity for working people. Albertans deserve to know the truth about our economy, and they deserve a government that actually cares about their livelihoods. Not long ago Alberta was known as a place where you could find opportunity, earn good wages, and build a life for your family, and we proudly spoke of an Alberta advantage. But today, after years of deliberate policy choices to hold down wages, that advantage has all but disappeared. In fact, Alberta is now being talked about as an Alberta disadvantage for workers. Wages are stagnating, the cost of living is soaring, and thousands of Alberta families are feeling the squeeze.

How did we get here? The answer is simple. We got here through decisions made by this UCP government, decisions to freeze minimum wages, to ignore rising costs, and to put corporate profits ahead of people. Even more galling, they tried to hide the evidence of their failure. For years government refused to reveal how many Albertans were stuck earning minimum wage. No wonder they were hesitant, Madam Speaker; the truth is alarming. According to the government's own data 142,700 Albertans were earning at or below the minimum wage as of 2022. That was about 7 per cent of Alberta's workforce. Even in 2023, with employment improving, 126,000 people, 6 per cent of Alberta's workers, still earned minimum wage. Think about that. Over 100,000 of our fellow Albertans trying to survive on just \$15 an hour. This is the human face of the government's low-wage policies.

3:20

Let me put a face to those numbers. Earlier this year I met a single mother in my constituency – I'll call her Amrita – who works full-time in a grocery store for minimum wage. She has two young children. Every day she stocks the shelves and serves customers with a smile on her face, but when I spoke with her, tears welled in her eyes as she described her situation. She said: no matter how hard I work, I fall behind a little more each month. Fifteen dollars an hour is simply not enough for her to pay the ever-rising rent on her apartment, keep up with utilities, and put healthy food on the table for her kids. She visits the local food bank twice a month despite working full-time. This is not laziness or irresponsibility, Madam Speaker. This is a hard-working Albertan, our neighbour, being failed by an economy that no longer rewards the hard work.

Sadly, her story is not unique. I have heard from seniors who, after decades in the workforce, find themselves taking minimum wage service jobs to supplement fixed incomes, from young graduates who can't find better than part-time minimum wage work, forcing them to move back in with their parents because they can't afford rent.

One of my constituents came to my office and told her story. She said that she has cut all the costs that she could cut from her life.

The only source of entertainment in her life was a basic Netflix subscription. She told me that she works full-time and if her car breaks down today, she does not have the money to get it repaired. She will be under debt while working full-time, while cutting all the costs that she can possibly cut in her life. These personal stories underscore what the data tells us: something is very wrong. When full-time workers cannot live in dignity, things need to change, policies need to change, and, if possible, the government needs to change.

Now, Madam Speaker, let me talk about that \$15 an hour minimum wage, a number that has not budged in six years. Six years without a single increase. Alberta's minimum wage has been frozen since 2018 despite the economy-wide inflation and despite every other province moving forward, in which time every other jurisdiction in Canada, every province, every territory, has increased their minimum wage by an average of 27 per cent across the country. Some have gone much further. And where is Alberta after six years of inaction? We have gone from leading the nation to having the lowest minimum wage in Canada, tied with Saskatchewan. Let that sink in. The wealthiest province in the country, with all our resources, now offers the lowest legal wage for its lowest paid workers.

Madam Speaker, this is not what we should be proud of. This is something we should be ashamed of. What does a six-year freeze mean in real terms? It means a huge pay cut for those who earn the least. Inflation has been punishing, especially these past few years. Since 2018 Alberta's minimum wage has lost 14 per cent of its purchasing power. In other words, \$15 today buys only what about \$12.90 bought back then. Everything else – groceries, gas, utilities, rent, insurance, tuition costs – has skyrocketed. So while Albertans like Amrita saw zero increase in their hourly pay, the cost of living raced ahead and effectively docked their pay by nearly a dollar and a half on every hour. Is it any surprise she's struggling to feed her kids when her already modest paycheque has been silently eroded by inflation?

We all know how crazy inflation has been. Just last year Alberta had the highest inflation in the country. We felt it in every corner of life. The Alberta Living Wage Network now pegs a living wage, the income needed to meet basic needs, at about \$20.85 in Edmonton and \$24.45 in Calgary. Let me repeat that. A living wage in Calgary is calculated at around \$24 an hour, yet our minimum wage is stuck at \$15 an hour. Even here in Edmonton you will need roughly \$21 an hour to get by comfortably, and we mandate only \$15, Madam Speaker. The math simply doesn't add up for families. Families are falling behind. Albertans are struggling.

I spoke with another Albertan, a father of three, who works two jobs, one in retail during the day and driving for a ride-share service at night, and he still can't keep up with the skyrocketing grocery bills and mortgage payments. He told me that he hasn't sat down to eat dinner with his kids in weeks because he was always out working. This is not the situation that Albertans expect from this government. They expect better. They want a government that is ethical. They want a government that is competent. They want a government that is honest. Unfortunately, in Alberta right now it's the complete opposite.

These are honest, hard-working people doing everything we ask of them, yet they are forced to make impossible choices. Rent or groceries? Heat or a winter coat for the kids? And here's an important point: who exactly are our minimum wage earners? The government would have you believe they are mostly teenagers earning pocket money. This is a myth, a convenient myth used to downplay the importance of fair wages.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join the debate on the Motion for a Return 10? The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. There are two pieces to this motion, I think, that are important. First is truly understanding minimum wage and what that means for Albertans, and the second is that this, like all of the other requests for returns we've put forward, is really about data and the provision of data and using data to inform decision-making.

I first want to spend a little bit of time talking about minimum wage itself. I'm going to put a timer on. Sorry. Life as a minimum wage earner is different because there's just not a lot of money in it. I'm sure like many people in this House, I was once a minimum wage earner. I reflect on that time in my life and I sometimes wonder how it all came together in the end, how I ended up being one of the lucky ones who didn't have to go to the food bank on a regular basis. I wasn't a single parent. You know, I'm a parent now, and I feel really blessed for that, but I'm happy that when I was a minimum wage earner, I was not a single parent.

When I was a minimum wage earner, I was working as a server. I was making \$5.90 an hour. It was not a lot of money, and I did rely on my tips to buy food, to put gas in my car, and to pay my rent. But a lot of minimum wage positions don't have tips. They're not a position that society says you must tip. So what happens to those people? What happens when you're reliant on a job that pays minimum wage and you live in our current times of affordability?

3:30

When I was being paid minimum wage, my rent was less than \$1,000 a month, and I lived on my own. Flip to now, modern times, many years later. My daughter makes minimum wage and works full-time hours and lives at home because she cannot afford to not live at home because affordability is a significant issue in this province and in other provinces. That's not to say that I don't love my daughter living at home 85 per cent of the time. I'm just joking. I do love the extra time with her, but I know that she wants to move out and she wants to have that independence, and I want that for her. Sadly, she cannot afford it because she makes minimum wage and she happens to live in the community of Canmore, probably one of the most expensive communities in Alberta.

To put this into perspective, many minimum wage earners are the foundation of the tourism-based economy in Canmore and Banff. They are our servers. They are our hospitality workers, who make our beds. They are the line cooks, who are chopping the onions and the celery that goes into the food that we eat every day amongst all the other things that they chop. I know that the government is used to chopping things, but that's not the kind of chopping that I'm talking about here. I'm actually talking about food that we eat. These roles in Canmore and Banff fuel a billion-dollar economy of tourism, yet many people who work in minimum wage jobs in Canmore and Banff have to work two or maybe even three jobs just to be able to afford to stay in our communities.

The situation is even more dire if they're parents. We have big problems in Canmore. Our living wage is \$38 an hour. What's minimum wage again? Not \$38 an hour. Minimum wage is less than half of what the living wage in Canmore is, which is why people need to work two or maybe three jobs. And I'll just reiterate again, Madam Speaker, that these people are fuelling a multibillion-dollar industry.

I stand here as their representative, as their MLA, and I just want to say: you're welcome. You're welcome for going to the food bank instead of buying food at Save-On or Safeway because they can't afford it because they're only making minimum wage. You're welcome for taking time off work to take care of sick children and taking an even greater financial hit because they can't necessarily afford child care in our community. You're welcome for that, too.

You're welcome for making your beds and cleaning your bathrooms and cooking all of your food. You're welcome.

Now, the UCP government members have stood in this House and have said that they don't need to address this motion because most wage earners in Alberta aren't making minimum wage and that the idea of minimum wage is that it's a stepping stone to other job prospects, where you're making more than minimum wage. To that I say: great; there are still people making minimum wage, so what about them? The reality is that Alberta has the lowest minimum wage in the country, as many of my colleagues have pointed out already, and that under this UCP government Alberta has higher inflation than the national average and the highest unemployment west of the Maritimes.

This UCP government is failing to steward the economy and create good jobs. That means that there are more people working minimum wage jobs. Just how many more? Well, we don't really know because they don't want to give us the data. In response to this motion the UCP has turned over the last two years of data, but we can't look at the trends over time because they're not willing to give us data from before that. This is really important. Long-term data sets are things that help us fuel evidence-based decision-making, helping us make better decisions that serve the people that we've been elected to serve.

As a scientist I can tell you that long-term data sets are something that we all strive for. That is how you can understand changes over time. You have to have continual data collected with the same methodology, collected with the same time frames to be able to truly understand trends. This UCP government doesn't want to turn over all the data, and I don't really understand why because then we can't actually look at the trend of how the number of minimum wage earners has changed over time. I think, particularly given that it's 2025, this is important because a really significant thing happened to our economy in 2020, the pandemic, and then the economic recovery and fallout that took years to change. It's really important for us to understand how the volume of minimum wage earners has changed over time, particularly since the pandemic.

The other part of this that I find really interesting is that it does make us question: why would we want to keep this information secret? Why would we just not want to share this? I don't actually think this is a very controversial piece of information. How many people are making minimum wage in Alberta? Just share that information. It's not controversial, so why the secrecy? Well, I think that if you have a government that continually iterates that the economy is doing great and it's improving and minimum wage is just a stepping stone to higher paying jobs but then they don't want to share the information that would prove that, you kind of have to question if that information exists. That's what I do all the time in this House, question the government and their lack of being able to be transparent and accountable to Albertans on a myriad issues, actually, not just this one.

If this government asserts that minimum wage is a stepping stone to higher paying jobs, then we would be able to see that in the data of the number of minimum wage earners over time in comparison to population growth. But because we don't see that data, we don't develop that trend line over time, we can't actually know and understand if minimum wage jobs are truly a stepping stone to higher paying jobs in the province.

The other thing that I think is important in this conversation is the current state of our education spending. We currently have the lowest per capita education spending of any province in Canada. That means that our students are not getting the attention that they need and deserve to truly succeed and achieve their potential in our public education system. This is particularly exacerbated right now with the strike of educational assistants, that is still ongoing, in part

because they are tired of making minimum wage for the incredible work that they do, requiring a tremendous amount of skill and education to do that work.

What happens, Madam Speaker, when you have a public education system that is not well funded is that people leave that system or graduate from that system not truly appreciating or understanding what their potential is. It also means that they may not be eligible for jobs that pay more than minimum wage. We have an education system that does not allow our students to achieve their full potential because they're not funded, and then . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Are there other members that wish to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Member Tejada: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to this motion for a return. I know that it'll come as no surprise to anyone, least of all should it be a surprise to any of us as elected officials, that we're living through an affordability crisis. I'm proud to be part of a caucus that is truly listening to Albertans and taking in their concerns while this government will only seemingly acknowledge the rapidly spiking cost of living by ensuring that they and their friends are living comfortably. I just want to take note that the UCP approved a 14 per cent increase in living allowance for themselves while they made more than double the average salary for any Albertan.

Since we're seeing that this government is consistently showing themselves to be out of touch while they're busy feathering already very cozy nests, skirting accountability by telling us that they refuse to do a public inquiry into allegations of corruption, folks across Alberta are having to choose between utilities and rent, insurance and food, and which bills might go to collections. They've even insisted that AISH benefits are generous, even as they're forcing folks to live below the poverty line. What I hear from folks on the doors – I've actually had to hold someone as they wept in my arms because here in Alberta, in order to pay their rent, they had to take their kids out of any programs that would help them integrate into Albertan society and have both parents working two jobs. That's unacceptable. It's shameful.

3:40

The casework that I'm seeing come out of my office, the number of people that are in desperate situations who are working – we're talking about the working poor. We're talking about a minimum wage that won't allow them to live. I'm hearing from folks in caring industries, from people who are working to support those in need, and those are also the people who are having to go to the food bank.

What this motion does is ask the government to at least collect the data. Forewarned is forearmed, and transparency is key, something that this government should take note of across ministries. Good information begets good decisions. I'll echo my colleague who introduced this, the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, that when we make policies that have the capacity to impact the lives of hundreds of thousands and even millions of people, the data should be verified, quantified, and easily understandable.

Just through a quick search that anyone can do on the Internet, according to Vibrant Communities Calgary and the Alberta Living Wage Network in the fall of 2024 the living wage in Calgary was \$24.45 an hour; \$10 an hour, or 63 per cent, higher than Alberta's minimum wage. The UCP stopped reporting on the number of Albertans who make minimum wage and only published reports two years after we brought our motion for a return. Instead of making life more affordable, the UCP has left us with the lowest minimum wage in the country. While I know that this government

is very boastful about having the most homes ever, being the most generous ever, we're last for minimum wage. Under the UCP inflation is higher than the national average, and we have the highest unemployment west of the Maritimes.

It brings me to the question: why are they refusing to publish this data, and why does it take us to raise the issue of getting the data? Is it about keeping the information hidden? We're seeing that all over the government. Given the sporadic reporting on this data, I think it's pretty reasonable for us to ask for this information. I know they have lots of opinions on who deserves to make minimum wage. They've told us time and time again. I've heard in this House members on the opposite side deride those who live and work in minimum wage conditions. I've heard them talk about: if you're taking out the garbage, why do you deserve to make more than minimum wage? So who deserves to make a living wage? Who in our province . . .

Mr. McIver: Nobody said that.

Member Tejada: Oh, I could find it in the *Hansard*. I'll find it.

Who deserves to go to bed hungry? Who deserves to have to make a decision on whether the lights go out? Who deserves to not have their kids in after school programming? I don't want to make assumptions, but having lived this experience myself as a person who lived in poverty, as a young person who worked for a tiered minimum wage, which this government bizarrely brought back, what are we telling our young people? You cancel the STEP program, and then you tell students that their work is not worth that of their peers that they work alongside.

I've heard them offer many opinions about who might be making a minimum wage, so then what we're doing right now is that we are begging you. Rather than give us your opinions about, "Oh, it's just a teenager, you know, trying to buy an iPod, making minimum wage," let's get the data. Let's back it up. I think what we can gather, at least from this motion, is that we want the data. We want to know who's making a minimum wage. I've heard a lot from the other side about who deserves to not make a living wage. We need transparency about who's on that list. We need more than quippy responses about low-skill workers.

They need to remember that they represent all Albertans. The people in caring industries, the people in serving industries are EAs who are running from classroom to classroom and who can barely make ends meet with the amount of rent that they have to pay every month. They have to remember that those who serve are those we serve. They deserve better. They need to understand. They need to get the information before making decisions on policy. It's a reckless decision not to raise the minimum wage, and I'm hoping against hope that this is one issue that they won't shroud in secrecy.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to address my colleague from Edmonton's motion. Just so we're clear on the motion, she's asking for "a list showing the number of Albertans, organized by year, paid the basic minimum wage described in section 9(1)(a.1) of the employment standards regulation . . . during the period from June 26, 2019, to March 31, 2024."

Previous colleagues have talked about why that's really important, Madam Speaker. I believe a long-time data set is necessary, and the criteria for a good data set, unlike the one that we've been provided with from the government, is that it's got the same methodology over time and it's the same time sets that are looked at. Why is that important? It's important because if you have

that information, you can then make good policy decisions, decisions that are based on not anecdotal information but real data, real information taken from across this province and then delivered to the people in the various departments that are looking at what the employment standards, employment wages, employment situation should be for Albertans.

It seems like a really good basic thing that governments want to put in place in terms of knowing why they're basing decisions. Is the information they're basing decisions on clear and dependable, and can it be researched by others? The point that I think my colleagues have tried to make over and over again is that it's important to be able to show Albertans that policy is made with transparent information, information that's verified, information that is credible.

Regrettably, this minimum wage hasn't increased since 2018, frozen for six years. I'm very proud of the fact that when we were government, one of the first things we did as a government was that we looked at the minimum wage at the time, and it was \$10 an hour, and we said back in 2015: that's really a difficult number for people to be making on an hourly basis, who have to take care of themselves, take care of their families. So over a series of increases it was raised to \$15 an hour, and that \$15 an hour, I'm proud to say, led the country as the highest minimum wage in Canada. As some of my colleagues have also mentioned, regrettably, we have slid back to the point of being the lowest minimum wage in the country. That's the responsibility, I think – or it's on the government that we're the lowest. There are 126,000 Albertans, or 6 per cent of the employment workforce, that are at that level.

Now, for 15 years before getting elected to city council, I was a social worker in Calgary, and I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that the people that I worked with and worked for were, you know, stalwarts. They were good Albertans who were trying to make a living, trying to improve their lot in life for themselves and their families, and it was difficult. They were often in precarious jobs, and they understood that going back to school or getting a break was their opportunity to get a better daily, hourly wage.

3:50

But not all of them were successful in that regard, and for those people who were having a lot of difficulties, I was tasked to try and help improve the quality of their lives. We often did that by trying to search out other jobs that would pay a higher wage, trying to get them back into school so that they could get improved qualifications or a diploma or some credit that would get them a higher income. I can tell you that, as my colleague just reiterated, a living wage in Calgary is far higher than the minimum wage. So even though the individuals that I was seeing were making sometimes that minimum wage, they were not – the quality of their life was challenged. They needed additional supports, and sometimes those were government supports, charity supports, and other kinds of things. We would try to find them so that they could improve their quality of life for themselves and their families.

Now, in Calgary at this point in time the cost of housing has skyrocketed. I know that, you know, we tend to hear that it may have gone down 2 per cent across the province in terms of increases in costs of housing, but in Calgary apartment rent for just a single-bedroom apartment is sometimes \$2,000, Madam Speaker. I don't know how people are getting by. Again, we try and assist in our office where we can, but it is very, very challenging for Albertans living in Calgary to make ends meet when the cost of their housing alone is \$2,000 for a single bedroom, and it's inadequate. If you're looking at a family and the needs of a couple of bedrooms or three bedrooms, then you have to be making a great deal more, and many, many people don't have that opportunity. We know that 126,000

Albertans are living on a minimum wage, and those just obviously are not young people under 18; they are Albertans with lives and with families.

Now, the points I wanted to bring up: I think my colleagues have done an excellent job, but I just wanted to reiterate a few points with regard to policy decisions. If information doesn't come to a minister up through the deputy minister and the department that is clear and understandable, ministers often don't make decisions. You know, if they don't get good inputs, then they have to wonder: are they making the best decision possible? And if you're not getting that information, whether you're the jobs minister or Finance minister or others, then you're getting anecdotal information, information that doesn't meet the test that my colleague was talking about; that is, good data sets.

Madam Speaker, I, like my colleagues, believe that we need to go back to the time when we were government. At the end of that, there was a break in terms of providing information to the ministers. That information is necessary to understand how to address the needs of the lowest waged workers in this province, those being minimum wage workers. And we need to see that change going forward with better information before too much time has passed.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Just Taber-Warner.

The Deputy Speaker: And/or a version of that.

Mr. Hunter: A version. Abbreviated version: Taber-Warner.

Madam Speaker, it's a privilege to be able to rise and speak to this motion for a return and to just maybe talk again about some of the things I've talked about in this House before, actually when some of the members were on this side and I was on that side. When I was first elected in 2015, the NDP were elected that year, and the NDP decided that they were going to take minimum wage from I believe it was \$10.70 to \$15 an hour. [interjections] Now, for those who are watching at home, the NDP are clapping and cheering, but let's go down memory lane. They say that hindsight is 20/20 vision. At the time I said to them: bad idea, because what's going to happen is going to be price shock. Lots of people are going to have difficulties being able to find those entry jobs, and a myriad of other things I talked about.

Madam Speaker, all of that happened. I remember talking with some people who were servers, and they were upset. At first they were excited about it, and then the reality kicked in. What happened was they got \$15 an hour versus their tips because people had a price shock, and they had to deal with that price shock. So the NDP: maybe they were trying to do something good, but let's just say that the reality did not match what their intention was.

When it all came out – there are a few members on this side of the House that were with me there, too. I remember I was the critic for labour at the time, and I sat down with the minister and said: look, this is what the data shows; when you have that kind of increase so quickly in minimum wage, you are going to have problems with young people getting jobs because businesses can't afford to bring those young people in. They considered it as a training wage. This is really what happened when the NDP brought in that increase to the minimum wage. But the truth is – again, hindsight is 20/20 vision – they were doing it because they wanted to raise the base wage for their union friends. Look, I mean, that's what they do, but in reality they did it, and in 2019 Albertans rejected that kind of economic stimuli.

Now, look, the reality is that in Alberta we have some of the highest disposable income in Canada, and the nice thing about that

is that there's more jingle in people's pockets. They can be able to go out and buy more things. It stimulates the economy, but it stimulates in a good way rather than an inflationary way. The problem with the NDP – I heard lots of arguments on that side from many members for the last hour or so. They would talk about the importance of having increased minimum wage, but then they would also talk about how we're in an affordability crisis. How can you say those two things in the same sentence, in the same speech, Madam Speaker? The reality is that when you have that kind of increase, from \$10.70 to \$15, that's inflationary. The fact that the members still do not understand that is ample reason why Albertans have rejected them election after election.

Ms de Jonge: One and done.

Mr. Hunter: One and done.

Madam Speaker, here's the way that it works in the real world. Nobody wants to stay on minimum wage. Nobody that I talk to wants to stay on minimum wage. What they realize is that if they get more skills and more education, then that equals more pay. Let me talk to you about the socialist way: don't worry about getting more education; don't worry about getting more skills; we'll just pay you anyways.

The NDP and their friends in Ottawa have been talking about this whole idea of a universal income, Madam Speaker. Well, universal income has been tried. In every communist country they try universal income. But you know what? It has been rejected by democratic societies all over the world, and it will continue to be rejected by democratic societies all over the world because they aren't communist. They actually believe that when you increase your education and your skills, that should equate to the merit of being paid more. We believe in the merit.

4:00

Mr. Schmidt: What if you're terrible at your job? Should you get a pay cut?

Mr. Hunter: Now, Madam Speaker, the reality is that they're continually heckling . . .

Mr. Schmidt: Let's cut your pay. You're terrible at your job.

Speaker's Ruling Insulting Language

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, what rule allows you to yell across the aisle at a member, saying, "You are terrible at your job"? I think this would be a great opportunity for you to apologize.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I am very sorry that the minister is terrible at his job and that he's getting paid what he is.

The Deputy Speaker: No, no, no.

Mr. Schmidt: He doesn't deserve it, Madam Speaker, and that's exactly what I was pointing out.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member.

Mr. Schmidt: Yep?

The Deputy Speaker: Can you please apologize for telling the member that he was . . .

Mr. Schmidt: I did.

The Deputy Speaker: No, you did not.

Mr. Schmidt: Madam Speaker, that is the rule. I said that I am sorry.

The Deputy Speaker: No, no, no. That is not the rule.

Mr. Schmidt: That is the rule.

The Deputy Speaker: You do not get to re-insult him.

Mr. Schmidt: You have my apology, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. member.

Debate Continued

Mr. Hunter: The same old same old, Madam Speaker. Just the angry left.

Again, I go back to this point, and I'll just finish up with this. The reality is that in a society where we believe that if you increase your education and your skills, that will merit the ability to be paid more, the NDP strategy is to circumvent and circumnavigate that. That is the reason why they continue to get some people to vote for them but they can't seem to form those majority governments, because everybody in this province gets the idea. Get more education, get more skills: that equals more pay, and it cannot be circumnavigated.

Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this. Thank you so much.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members to join the debate? The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thanks, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the member opposite getting up to speak to this Motion for a Return from the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview that moved that
an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a list showing the number of Albertans, organized by year, paid the basic minimum wage described in . . . the employment standards regulation . . . during the period from June 26, 2019, to March 31, 2024.

The member wants to get up and talk about some past election but does not want to talk about the inability of the government to just show some data. This is complete governing by anecdote, Madam Speaker, governing by narrative and ideology versus governing with the best information available.

A motion is put forward: may we have some information? And the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade got up and said: I recommend that the Assembly reject this motion requesting information. He says this information is unknowable. It's unfindable, practically unsearchable. It cannot be found. We cannot bring it forward and use it to govern; that's impossible, Madam Speaker. That's paraphrasing the minister, what he said.

He then went on to boast that 47 per cent of minimum wage earners in our province are living at home with their parents. Such a boast, Madam Speaker. Is there any doubt that someone earning minimum wage in this province is unable to live independently, on their own, that they must stay at home? This is a huge concern when it comes to affordability. When we are talking about getting the information forward to the Assembly on the minimum wage, it's to address those concerned parents that I have in Sherwood Park that have their kids living at home, not earning enough to afford a high quality of life in this province, not leaving the nest soon enough or at a typical time that we're used to.

What a boast from the minister, that 47 per cent of Albertans on minimum wage are living at home. How would someone afford life in this province when they are earning \$15 an hour? We'll review

some history to our minimum wage, but we'll also recognize that we've been talking about a living wage in this province.

There are also parts of the survey that identify that there are a lot of people that at their second job they're earning a minimum wage. Wouldn't that be something, if their full-time job paid enough so that they could live a high quality of life here in this Alberta? Maybe they would have time then to follow the steps that the Member for Taber-Warner laid out, that you can go get the extra education and extra training that will get you that higher wage in this province.

The Member for Taber-Warner reminds me that there are so many on that side of the House that worship at the free market that have never built a payroll in their own career. A schoolteacher for all his career then moves into public service through the Assembly, and it seems that he can tell us what the best way is to build a payroll for a company. I don't actually believe that's probably the experience that would lead you to be the top expert on wages in this province.

This government is unwilling to be transparent, to present information that's being requested, just as they're not brave enough to call a public inquiry into the corrupt care scandal. We're seeing the same pattern of lack of transparency from this government on a simple question that asked for information that should have been: "Sure. We'll provide that to the Assembly. That's really good. Thanks for asking it." What holds them back? When I hear some of the logic presented by the members across that side, I actually wonder if they think that we don't need a minimum wage in this province. What holds them back from being brave enough to get rid of the minimum wage if we don't need a minimum wage in this province? They're not brave enough to stick to their ideology of their worship at this magical free market that has always been regulated by a government.

Governments regulate the free market, and part of that addressing of affordability in our province is recognizing that people need to earn money on their side of the ledger and we need to have regular review of our minimum wage. We have reviewed it in the past. You know, between 2015 and 2018 the minimum wage was brought up. The Member for Taber-Warner talked about some shift from \$10.75 to \$15 that somehow had some price shock on the market, but that's not how it went, Madam Speaker.

We reviewed it. It went to \$11.20 after reviewing the data and information. That was in 2016. In 2017 we reviewed it. It went to \$12.20. The market had time to adapt. People had time to find out at their restaurants if the customers would accept a better price or pay more for their goods, or maybe they would start producing better goods or different menu items. Whatever it is that your business is, you were given steps across the path of this. In 2018 we reviewed it, and it went to \$13.60 an hour, and then in 2018 it went to \$15 an hour, and it has stayed there.

As we know, since 2018 a lot has changed in the affordability of our province. A lot has changed in affordability that is controlled by this government: auto insurance, utility costs, and the cost of housing and rent in this province because not enough housing is available and not affordably.

There was also this reduction in minimum wage that happened since 2019 for students, moving it down to \$13 per hour. For people that were able to work enough hours, they were then maybe moved into the adult category. There's a lot of unfairness for young workers who are not all living rent free under their parents' roof with no bills to pay or bills that are being shared with their parents.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Many are saving for postsecondary education. We know the cost for training and education is going up in this province. Without help

or support from a family how are these people going to afford to get the upgrading, to get the education that they know will lead to better life and better jobs?

Imagine working, Mr. Speaker, just as hard as your adult co-workers and just having that rubbed in your face, that you get paid less because of your age. That discrimination is terrible, and it's not recognizing that you get paid for the work you do or the quality of the work you do. Getting paid less just because of your age: that's unfair. It's also exploitation.

4:10

Mr. Speaker, despite the cost of living, minimum wage has remained stagnant in our province, leading to a decline of the real purchasing power from minimum wage earners. They're not contributing as much to our economy because they are barely covering their rent. The ratio of what your cost for your rent is on your total earnings is out of step in this province with what is recommended for a healthy economy. In a healthy economy it's recommended that your wages used for your rent at most will be 30 per cent, would be the maximum. If you earned \$1,000 in a month, only \$300 would go towards rent. But that's not what we're living with in this province. What we're seeing are rents in the range of \$1,200 and up. In some places, as was mentioned, in Canmore and Banff, it's triple that for rent.

It's recommended that if this government would be following a natural step forward in the progress of addressing minimum wage, we would probably be at about \$19 in this province. Instead, the government has left our businesses and employers exposed to a shock if there were ever to be steps to bring forward legislation that would raise the minimum wage in this province, which is natural in a government in Canada. We have minimum wage standards.

Mr. Hunter: Like \$10 to \$15, like that shock? You just admitted it.

Mr. Kasawski: No; I appreciate that the member wants me to review that again.

We went from \$10.75, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any others wishing to speak? The Member for Lethbridge-West.

Member Miyashiro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I won't drag this out a lot. A lot of my colleagues have said what I wanted to say. What hasn't been said, really, is the impact on people that are already with low income that we haven't talked about, people like seniors. In my work in the senior sector we've seen more seniors having to go back to work because of affordability issues. We've seen their rents rise faster than their pension savings have allowed them to live where they've been living just off their pension alone. We've seen the prices of groceries have a profound impact on how seniors shop. I've seen so many seniors have to go back to work. Are we saying that because it's minimum wage, they shouldn't be paid properly?

The question that my colleague just talked about was: this is all about giving us the numbers to make better decisions based on good data. That's all it is. It's not here to defend or not defend minimum wage; it is just to give us the numbers so we can make better policy decisions. But if you want to make policy decisions, let's talk about the impacts of minimum wage on things like prices. There's a study in the U.S. that showed that for every 10 per cent increase in minimum wage, prices increased .36 per cent. The study also found that minimum wage increases lead to increased employment in the low-wage labour market. That was MacDonald and Nilsson, 2016.

When minimum wage is boosted, low-wage workers receive a net gain under the increase in the minimum wage despite facing

slightly higher prices, as this increase increases the total income of these low-wage workers. That's Hajer and Smirl, 2020. To respond, governments should develop a strategy for those in poverty who are not minimum wage earners such as boosting employment income assistance, which could be paid for by the increased income taxes received by higher earning minimum wage workers, also by Hajer and Smirl from 2020.

Does increasing the minimum wage cost or save the government money? The poverty minimum wage means thousands of workers rely on being paid less than the minimum wage to survive. This is costly in terms of rent assistance, food bank usage, poverty, child poverty, social issues. What we have also seen is that for small businesses that are service industry businesses like corner stores, restaurants, coffee shops, cleaning companies, et cetera, when that minimum wage goes up, it goes up for all of their competitors. So you can't just say that when the minimum wage goes up at store A, they're penalized because no one else is going to have that same increase. They're on the same playing field and can gradually adjust prices to cover the costs. In some instances small businesses lose employees to big companies who can pay more. Raising the minimum wage increases the playing field for smaller firms that have to compete for employees with larger businesses.

Minimum wage also boosts income for low-income workers, and it doesn't really have an impact on employment for teenagers as a member across the aisle said. A Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives study of all provincial minimum wages and employment changes from 1983 to 2012 found no consistent evidence that minimum wage affects employment levels. Two leading American meta studies that looked at dozens of minimum wage studies show that minimum wage increases have little or no effect on employment levels or job growth. This was Schmitt 2013, Belman and Wolfson 2014.

In 2011 B.C. increased the minimum wage by 28 per cent to catch up for past inactions. This increase did not result in job losses for adult minimum wage earners. That was Green 2015. Claims by business lobbyists or right-leaning think tanks that jobs are lost are not credible. David Green showed that studies being used by these groups are outdated and based on data from the 1990s or during the recession.

Mr. Speaker, what we have to look at is the whole way our economy works and everything that has an impact on how people live. Cost of living, affordability, housing: all of those things play into it. If you're paying people more money and if we understand how many people this is going to affect, we're able to develop programs and services.

You talked about tuition. Someone was complaining about students, that they don't work full-time; they don't need more money. Well, a lot of college and university students depend on those jobs that they're doing in order just to live. Again, especially in Lethbridge, we have the highest housing costs, rental housing costs in the province. How do you expect people, students that are going to University of Lethbridge and Lethbridge College to afford that now that food is going up and now that rent is going up? We need that data so that we know how we can approach the whole issue of minimum wage.

Mr. Speaker, I think when the member across the aisle talks about that there's not very much data available – all the stuff I just told you, I just googled before I started speaking.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to speak? Seeing none, the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to close debate. It's waived. We'll call the question.

[Motion for a Return 10 lost]

Sexually Transmitted Infection and Disease Incidence

M12. Mr. Sabir moved on behalf of Dr. Metz that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all surveillance reports prepared by the Ministry of Health between May 1, 2019, and March 31, 2024, relating to the incidence of sexually transmitted infections and diseases in Alberta.

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

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. It's my pleasure to rise on behalf of my colleague from Calgary-Varsity to propose the motion. I think in democratic, open, honest governments that kind of information is available as a matter of routine, but here we have the UCP, so we have to request an order of the Assembly. We have to do FOIP requests essentially to get information that any open and honest government will make available to its citizens as a matter of course.

With that, I urge the government to provide that information and support this motion. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Is the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall moving that motion?

Mr. Sabir: Yes, I move that motion.

The Acting Speaker: Okay. Thank you.

Any other members wishing to speak to Motion for a Return 12? Ah, sorry. The Minister of Health has risen.

4:20

Member LaGrange: I am standing; sorry.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I'm happy to put this on the public record. The chief medical officer of health declared a provincial syphilis outbreak in Alberta on July 16, 2019. The reasons for the increase in rates are not fully known as it is a very complex issue with many causes at play. However, a variety of factors have likely contributed to this rise, including improved diagnostic methods and more effective contact tracing in case findings. Availability of highly effective HIV treatments may have also contributed to a decrease in public perception of risks related to sexual activity and a reduced condom use.

Research has shown a clear connection between methamphetamine use, commonly known as meth, engagement in high-risk sexual activities, and also an increased likelihood of contracting sexually transmitted infections. While I can say that these infections can often present without noticeable symptoms or with only mild symptoms, they may go unnoticed, and that could also contribute to the cases.

In some cases the symptoms may be nonspecific, meaning that they can resemble other common illnesses and may not immediately raise concerns. As a result, individuals who are infected may not receive a timely diagnosis or treatment, which can allow the infection to persist undetected. Without proper care these individuals may unknowingly continue to spread the infection to others, further fuelling the cycle. The lack of visible or obvious symptoms often delays testing and medical intervention, which means the infection could remain untreated for a longer period of time, increasing the risk of complications.

It is also important to acknowledge that public health efforts in Alberta as well as in all other provinces were significantly diverted to pandemic response. The focus on managing COVID-19 took priority, which meant that some ongoing public health initiatives, including those aimed at addressing the rising rates of sexually transmitted infections, were temporarily put on hold or scaled back.

This shift in priorities created challenges in maintaining the level of attention and resources needed to tackle other pressing health concerns, including syphilis and other STIs.

Understanding these factors is crucial as they provide insight into the underlying reasons for the rise in syphilis and other sexually transmitted infections. By identifying the key contributors, we have been able to refine our response and adapt our strategies to be more effective in addressing the syphilis outbreak. In 2023, for the first time since the outbreak was declared, rates of infectious syphilis and cases of congenital syphilis decreased from the previous year. I want to highlight that they, in fact, did decrease. This drop could be attributed to a combination of increased awareness and initiatives implemented to combat the outbreak.

For example, Alberta Health provides over \$7 million annually to six community-based organizations across the province for sexually transmitted and blood-borne infection prevention, testing, and treatment and to support wraparound services to people in vulnerable situations who are diagnosed with these infections. Another \$3.2 million annually has been provided for syphilis outbreak responses, including enhanced street outreach activities for vulnerable individuals in Edmonton to enhance awareness, access to testing and treatment, and facilitate prenatal screening. All of these are of course to make sure that we can lower those numbers more and more.

Funding is also provided to AHS for a prenatal syphilis outbreak response project throughout Alberta to enhance prenatal infectious and congenital syphilis case management, including testing, treatment, and follow-up to prevent further transmission of syphilis in the community. The project also supports increased access to testing and treatment in Edmonton and the north zone and targets populations vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections based on local infection rates and trends.

Successfully addressing the rising rates of syphilis requires a collective approach that engages stakeholders across the continuum of care. Community-based organizations are well equipped to help underserved populations through prevention, outreach, testing, and referrals and other wraparound services. We find that these are the best approaches because these are people working on the ground with our most vulnerable. That is why we took decisive action in 2023 by launching the syphilis outbreak action response – we call it the SOAR – grant program. This initiative was created to provide funding to community-based organizations that are on the front lines of prevention, testing, and treatment efforts.

Eight organizations have received funding for a total of \$6 million over three years to develop and implement initiatives with a focus on populations and geographic areas experiencing higher rates of infectious syphilis or congenital syphilis. Five projects focus on increased awareness and access to testing and treating, including a mobile STBBI testing, treatment, and education project in the north zone. Three projects focus on education and awareness, including development of resources and education for health care providers. By supporting grassroots initiatives, the grant program is strengthening our collective ability to slow the spread of syphilis, improve health outcomes, and protect vulnerable populations.

These funds are providing much-needed fuel to continue efforts that help raise awareness about syphilis and overall sexual health, ensuring that more people have the information they need to make informed decisions. Additionally, Mr. Speaker, the funds are improving access to culturally safe and appropriate care, ensuring that individuals from diverse backgrounds feel supported and respected when seeking help.

Alberta, like many other jurisdictions in Canada and around the world, has experienced a rapid increase of sexually transmitted infections during the last decade. With investments like the syphilis

outbreak action response grant, or SOAR grant, along with ongoing funding for various programs through Alberta Health Services, this government continues to demonstrate its commitment to addressing sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections in our province.

We recognize that some communities and regions are more affected than others, and we are focusing our efforts where they are needed most. Through targeted support, education, and access to care we are working to reduce infections, protect vulnerable populations, and improve health outcomes for all Albertans. By continuing to invest in prevention and treatment, we are taking meaningful steps towards turning the tide on this outbreak and building a healthier future for our province.

Again, we're doing a great deal, and we will continue to monitor and make improvements and shift as we need to, but we are making record investments to make sure that we address this very, very serious issue. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to speak?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has an opportunity to close debate if he so wishes.

[Motion for a Return 12 lost]

The Acting Speaker: I will recognize the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Stop Orders to Child Care Providers

M14. Mr. Sabir moved on behalf of Member Batten that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing the number of stop orders issued by year and location to persons not authorized to provide child care facilities under the Early Learning and Child Care Act, during the period from May 1, 2019, to March 31, 2024.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, a simple question that should be available as a matter of routine, and I hope that this time around we won't get to hear all kinds of things and not a commitment that this information will not be made available.

With that, I move this motion.

The Acting Speaker: Okay. I will recognize the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade, I believe. Yes; the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade.

Mr. Jones: You got it, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to speak to Motion for a Return 14 as proposed by the Member for Calgary-Acadia. The original motion submitted by the member reads as follows: "the number of stop orders issued by [region and fiscal year] to persons not authorized to provide child care facilities under the Early Learning and Child Care Act, during the period from May 1, 2019, to March 31, 2024." I would be pleased to table this information in the Assembly subject to one minor amendment, which I would now like to propose. I have the original and the required number of copies.

4:30

The Acting Speaker: We will wait till the table officers have copies.

Okay. The member may proceed.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jones moved that Motion for a Return 14 be amended by striking out "the period from May 1, 2019, to March 31, 2024" and substituting "the period from February 1, 2021, to March 31, 2024".

The proposed amendment would amend the time frame stated in the motion to read "February 1, 2021, to March 31, 2024." The reason is simple. This update would coincide with legislative amendments to the act which came into force February 2021. The amendments to the act allowed for the ministry to issue stop orders to unlicensed child care when an imminent threat to the safety of children exists. Until the amendments came into force, the ministry was limited to issuing stop orders to unlicensed operators that were providing services to more than six children. Any data collected by the ministry before February 2021 would not capture the full scope of the ministry's authority.

Alberta's government is committed to providing safe, high-quality, and affordable child care that meets the diverse needs of families across the province. When parents, guardians, and caregivers go to work or school, they need to know that their children are safe in our system. Alberta's government monitors licensed child care programs across the province and takes the appropriate actions to ensure compliance with the Early Learning and Child Care Act and early learning and child care regulation. We're increasing transparency and accountability across the system, and we're taking immediate action to enhance and enforce health and safety in child care facilities. We strongly believe that keeping children safe is everyone's business.

To reiterate, I'd be pleased to table the information requested by the member opposite provided the time frame is amended to be more accurate and best address the member's motion. Mr. Speaker, I encourage all members to vote in favour of the amendment.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Anyone wishing to speak to the amendment as presented by the Minister for Jobs, Economy and Trade?

Mr. Sabir: Question.

The Acting Speaker: Seeing none, I'll ask the question.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Acting Speaker: Any others wishing to speak to the amended motion?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Motion for a Return 14 as amended carried]

Red Deer Hospital Redevelopment

M17. Mr. Sabir moved on behalf of Mr. Deol that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all documents prepared by the Ministry of Infrastructure that set out which parts of the Red Deer hospital redevelopment capital project will be delivered using the public-private partnership model.

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

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move Motion for a Return 17 on behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Meadows. Unless you want me to read it into the record, I just rise to move Motion for a Return 17.

The Acting Speaker: It won't be necessary to read it into the record. We all have a record of it.

Any others wishing to speak? The Minister of Infrastructure has risen.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to Motion for a Return 17, requesting all documents prepared

by the Ministry of Infrastructure around construction of the Red Deer hospital redevelopment project being delivered by P3. Alberta Infrastructure must reject this motion as the documents requested are provided as confidential advice to Treasury Board only.

Mr. Speaker, our government assesses the viability of all of the capital projects valued at \$100 million or more to be delivered using a public-private partnership. P3s have provided more than \$3.4 billion in savings to Albertans when compared to other delivery methods. We assess all delivery methods, including P3s, according to the project type, location, and complexity. If that assessment demonstrates P3 viability, we develop a confidential business case. The business case is shared with Treasury Board and necessary government officials to provide them with the details to approve or reject the project. While we reject Motion for a Return 17, I assure you we are committed to getting the best value for taxpayers and we remain objective in selecting the right delivery method for every project.

Now, regarding motions for returns 16 and 18. We happily provided responses for Motion for a Return 16. Infrastructure accepted this motion. But I would like to clarify that projects are outlined in the government of Alberta capital plan and further broken down in the capital plan of each ministry, so they were already publicly available. We also accept Motion for a Return 18. From May 1, 2019, to September 30, 2024, there was only one project where an honorarium of \$850,000 was paid to each of the two unsuccessful bidders in the P3 procurement to deliver five Alberta high schools. This P3 project resulted in savings of over \$114 million, which includes honorariums, when compared to traditional delivery methods, demonstrating the value of using P3s and the benefit to taxpayers.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, this P3 project won two awards: first in October 2022 for best education and higher education project at the P3 Awards hosted by P3 Bulletin in New York and second in November 2022, when it received a gold award for project development from the Canadian Council for Public-Private Partnerships' national awards for innovation and excellence.

Mr. Speaker, honorariums are not a new part of the process. They exist because the time required to bid is an extensive and collaborative time-consuming process.

Alberta Infrastructure is committed to ensuring all projects are planned, designed, and built with the best value of Albertans in mind. Whether it's a traditional build or P3, we will remain transparent to Albertans and to our industry partners throughout all stages of construction. It is our responsibility to pursue value for money when it comes to capital projects. We remain committed to utilizing taxpayer funds in the most efficient and effective manner possible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to speak?

An Hon. Member: Question.

The Acting Speaker: Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Motion for a Return 17 lost]

2023 Wildfire Season Documents

M19. Mr. Sabir moved on behalf of Ms Sweet that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all reports, evaluations, communications, and recommendations prepared by the government relating to the 2023 wildfire season of March 1, 2023, to October 31, 2023.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has risen.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-Manning I rise to move Motion for a Return 19.

The Acting Speaker: Motion for a Return 19 has been moved. I see the Minister of Forestry and Parks has risen.

Mr. Loewen: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to speak on Motion for a Return 19 regarding the 2023 wildfire season. This motion for a return requests copies of all reports, evaluations, communications, and recommendations related to Alberta's response to the unprecedented 2023 wildfire season. My ministry has declined this motion, and I'd like to take this time to explain the reasons behind this decision.

First and foremost, the request as written is simply not feasible due to its broad and nonspecific nature. This government, through Alberta Wildfire and the Ministry of Forestry and Parks, manages a wide variety of reports, evaluations, and communications related to wildfire operations across the province. These materials are essential for both immediate wildfire response and long-term planning, including our strategies for prevention, mitigation, and future fire season preparedness. However, it is not feasible to provide copies of all these materials as the request does not clarify the specific documents sought.

4:40

With a scope so unclear, providing these documents would be an unreasonable burden on Alberta Wildfire. It would require excessive manpower and an immense amount of time and resources to compile. While the work we're doing is fully transparent, it feels to me like this request would force us to focus our efforts and our valuable resources on photocopying thousands of pages of papers given that no clear scope or purpose was provided for this request. At a time in which Alberta's wildfire seasons are more demanding than ever and require more action, more vigilance, and more preparation, our government would rather make sure that the priority of our teams remains responding to the fires and protecting Albertans' communities.

Last year we saw one of the busiest wildfire seasons on record. In fact, last July alone we saw more than 400 fires sparked by lightning. Alberta Wildfire crews responded to more than 1,210 wildfires in the forest protection area, more than the previous year's record-breaking total. While the number of fires in 2024 exceeded the total number in 2023, the area burned that season was 700,000 hectares less, which was about a third of the 2 million hectares that were burned during the 2023 season. These facts alone highlight how important the work being done is and how vital it is that it can continue to be done without needless disruption or interruptions. Throughout the season Alberta Wildfire crews worked around the clock, often risking their own safety to protect communities across the province, and our shared priority, the priority of all those working on wildfire response, is the protection of Albertans, not the administrative task of gathering thousands of pages of documents.

Our government has made historic investments to ensure we're better prepared for fire seasons now and in the future. For example, we've allocated \$155 million in 2024 year, and I was proud to announce just last week another \$160 million invested in Alberta's wildfire base funding through Budget 2025 to ensure our teams have the resources they need to protect communities. We recruited more wildland firefighters. We contracted more firetack crews. We added more equipment, including air tankers, helicopters with night-vision technology, and bolstered our overall response capacity. These efforts

are already showing results. Today we're seeing around 10 active wildfires, all under control, a significant difference from the 60 or so we saw at this time last year, and that is thanks to the incredible work of our firefighters that they're doing, the resilience of our communities, and the investments we made into mitigation and readiness to respond.

During the 2024 wildfire season front-line crews were able to respond quickly, containing 85 per cent of the wildfires within 24 hours of detection. While last year's wildfire season has not been without loss, including large wildfires near Jasper that led to evacuations, through the tragic loss of an Alberta wildland firefighter, and the loss of homes and businesses in the community, Alberta Wildfire demonstrated remarkable co-ordination, offering immediate aid and resources to Parks Canada, including support personnel, firefighters, aircraft, and equipment. Response to wildfires is demanding, but it demonstrates the effectiveness of our investments, our resources, and our people. It also highlights how vital preparation is, how important it is to make sure our resources are appropriately committed to tackling future challenges.

In addition to concerns about the scope of the request, there are also issues regarding the confidentiality of certain documents. The province did conduct a comprehensive internal review for the 2023 wildfire season, and the findings from this review have already informed improvements to our wildfire operations ahead of the 2024 season. However, records associated with this internal review are confidential, protected by Treasury Board confidentiality agreements. Releasing such information would compromise the integrity of internal processes and valuable insights used to guide future wildfire responses.

What I can offer in response to this motion for a return is that information about a review commissioned by our colleagues at Public Safety and Emergency Services is forthcoming. This review is titled 2023 spring wildfire postincident assessment, Alberta Emergency Management Agency. It's set to be completed in 2025, and once it is finished, its findings will be made available to the public. However, until that time I ask for your understanding that our team's focus must remain on the pressing work of fighting fires and preparing for this new season. The demands on Alberta Wildfire and our firefighting teams have never been greater, and every effort is being made to ensure that we are fully equipped to face the challenges ahead.

In conclusion, I would like to offer thanks for the opportunity to speak on this motion for a return. While I understand the desire to review reports and assessments of our wildfire operations, we must balance this with the reality of the situation. Our resources are valuable, our personnel are dedicated to front-line work, and our priority is to continue preparing for the dry months ahead. We will continue to adapt and strengthen our wildfire management strategies and remain focused on what matters most: working to protect Albertans, their homes, and their livelihoods.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to speak?

[Motion for a Return 19 lost]

**Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'll call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 206

**Child and Youth Advocate (Parent and Guardian
Advisor) Amendment Act, 2024**

The Deputy Chair: I will recognize the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am happy to rise today to move an amendment to my private member's Bill 206, Child and Youth Advocate (Parent and Guardian Advisor) Amendment Act, 2024, in Committee of the Whole.

The Deputy Chair: The member may proceed.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Do you need me to read the entire amendment through?

The Deputy Chair: I believe so. Yes, that would be helpful.

Mr. Cyr: Unfortunately, I was negligent and sent my copy over to you, if you wouldn't mind. My apologies to the chair. Thank you so much.

I am to move that Bill 206, Child and Youth Advocate (Parent and Guardian Advisor) Amendment Act, 2024, be amended as follows:

- (a) in the title by striking out "Parent and Guardian Advisor" and substituting "Parent and Guardian Liaison";
- (b) by striking out section 2 and substituting the following:
 - 2 Section 1 is amended by adding the following immediately after clause (f):
 - (f.01) "Liaison" means the Parent and Guardian Liaison designated under section 15.61;
- (c) in section 6, in the proposed Division 2, as follows:
 - (i) in the heading immediately before section 15.6 by striking out "Parent and Guardian Advisor" and substituting "Parent and Guardian Liaison";
 - (ii) by striking out "an Advisor" wherever it occurs and substituting "a Liaison";
 - (iii) by striking out "the Advisor" wherever it occurs and substituting "the Liaison";
 - (iv) in section 15.61 by striking out "acting Advisor" wherever it occurs and substituting "acting Liaison";
 - (v) in section 15.63, by adding "and" at the end of clause (a) and by striking out clause (b);
- (d) by striking out section 9 and substituting the following:
 - 9 This act comes into force on Proclamation.
- (e) in the following sections by striking out "Advisor" wherever it occurs and substituting "Liaison":
 - section 3, in the proposed section 8
 - section 5, in the proposed section 10
 - section 7, in the proposed section 21
 - section 8, in the proposed section 22

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

These amendments include substituting the title "Advisor" with "Liaison" as well as having the act come into force upon proclamation, giving the government and the office adequate time to prepare for this change.

4:50

I have greatly enjoyed the many months and thorough consultation with my MLA colleagues and community stakeholders. I have gained invaluable insights and strengthened my conviction in the importance of this legislation and the aforementioned amendments, and I was pleased to see it pass second reading in the spring session of last year.

Mr. Chair, we as parents and guardians are acutely aware of the value of having resources to support our kids through the roller

coaster ride of raising them. Though no parent is perfect and I know full and well that we all make mistakes, I'm sure many would have loved to have had the opportunity to seek out help from resources like this to guide me through this process of being a new parent, particularly early on. It is because of this that I introduced private member's Bill 206, Child and Youth Advocate (Parent and Guardian Advisor) Amendment Act, 2024, and these important amendments to this legislation that I'm speaking to today.

If passed, Bill 206 creates a needed and trusted resource for parents and guardians, and these proposed amendments provide important changes to it. As I've previously stated, Mr. Chair, I was inspired to bring this bill forward after seeing the challenges my nephew Matthew and his parents experienced while struggling with the existing supports available following his diagnosis of severe autism spectrum disorder when he was a toddler. I love and am extremely proud of the young man that my nephew Matthew has become through this remarkable time, and it is because of all of the wonderful work of those that helped raise him, including his parents and everyone else that assisted him along the way, that made him successful and the man he is today.

For just an update for those: my nephew Matthew now works for the John Howard Society, helping the homeless within my constituency. That is a remarkable story, and I will tell you that if he hadn't had the supports that he had through his childhood, he wouldn't be the man he is today.

Whether it's for first-time parents worried about their newborn's health or for those trying to identify government programs that are best suited for their child's needs, a parent and guardian liaison will be able to be that critical link for families guiding them through these important decisions and challenges. These processes and programs are intended to help and support parents, not burden them with endless bureaucracy and red tape, something I know that this side of the Chamber has been actively advocating against since our UCP government's first mandate in 2019.

If this Assembly is to pass private member's Bill 206 and these important amendments, a centralized resource to support and advocate for parents and guardians would be created to help them through the processes that are oftentimes overwhelming and challenging, help them avoid unnecessary hurdles, including what my nephew Matthew and my sister and brother-in-law went through.

As it stands now, such a centralized advocacy point of contact for parents does not exist. Shouldn't they have one? I think they should, Mr. Chair, and I know many other Albertans do as well. I'm hoping that members on both sides of this Chamber do believe in this, too. I think so because parents and guardians deserve to have that supportive and independent liaison to help them through understanding their rights and to connect them to the resources that would benefit them the most, many of which they would not otherwise know exist. I believe that this resource would evolve to be instrumental over time to the point of perhaps one day being expanded upon to meet more challenges later on.

I also believe that all parents and guardians in this Chamber should be able to see and understand the utility of having legislation like this in place. Moreover, I believe, along with many of my colleagues on this side of the Chamber, that parents and guardians are the child's primary caregivers.

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt, but we have come to 4:55, and pursuant to Standing Order 8(6) the chair shall interrupt the proceedings and call on the committee to rise and report without question put.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: I recognize the Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 206. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

Motions Other than Government Motions

Epinephrine Autoinjectors

518. Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to undertake a policy review, with the objective of expanding protection for Albertans who are at risk of anaphylaxis caused by severe life-threatening allergic reactions, on the feasibility of facilitating the availability and use of epinephrine autoinjectors by the following categories of entities that interact with the public:

- (a) businesses;
- (b) municipal fire departments;
- (c) emergency medical services operators;
- (d) school bus carriers.

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

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand here to move my Motion 518, and it is with pleasure that I rise to speak on Motion 518 also and explain why I believe the content of this motion is so critical.

[The Speaker in the chair]

If passed this motion would urge the government to undertake a policy review on facilitating the use of epinephrine autoinjectors by businesses, municipal fire departments, EMS operators, and school bus carriers. As entities that are constantly interacting with the public, they are well positioned to provide life-saving interventions.

When someone with a serious allergy encounters an allergen, whether from food, medication, or an insect sting, they risk entering anaphylaxis or a severe allergic reaction. Severe allergic reactions can be fatal within mere minutes. This rapid onset of symptoms means that treatment must be equally immediate. Thankfully, hospital protocols account for this and anaphylaxis is a high priority in triage, but, Mr. Speaker, allergic reactions don't wait until you're at the hospital to strike. You or someone you know could have one triggered at a park, at home, or at a local restaurant. With a variety of allergies people have, this is a crisis you could face pretty much anywhere.

This is what makes epinephrine autoinjectors such a wonder of modern medicine; they offer people with severe allergies a portable way to receive early intervention when experiencing anaphylaxis. When administered, epinephrine reverses airway swelling and stops the release of more chemicals from the body that can worsen the reaction. Due to the possibility of biphasic reaction, which can be experienced hours later, even without further exposure to the allergen, it is still important to seek treatment after receiving

epinephrine, but that injection is often only one thing which allows someone experiencing anaphylaxis to make it that far.

Among children and youth in Alberta the number of epinephrine autoinjectors dispensed is higher than amongst the adult population, with approximately 20 per 1,000 males aged one to 14 and 14 per 1,000 females at the same age range. I'm very proud that in Alberta we have taken additional steps to protect children and youth from the threat of anaphylaxis. Perhaps my proudest accomplishment as an MLA was being part of the process that made the Protection of Students with Life-threatening Allergies Act a reality. It was an honour to sponsor Bill 201 and to work with some fantastic and passionate people and organizations like Alberta Health, Alberta Education, Food Allergy Canada in its formulation. That legislation made it mandatory for schools in Alberta to have a stock of epinephrine autoinjectors and employees on site who are trained to use them. Since children are at a higher risk of anaphylaxis, this was a necessary policy.

But, Mr. Speaker, people of all ages are at risk of severe allergic reactions. I personally have severe food allergies and always keep an epinephrine autoinjector close to me. While the number of autoinjectors dispensed per thousand is generally lower once you move from youth into adolescence and adulthood, a 2014 survey found that only 1 in 5 Canadians at risk for an anaphylactic reaction remember to carry an epinephrine autoinjector at all times. I mention these statistics to stress the fact that expanding access to epinephrine autoinjectors in public spaces will save lives, regardless of age or circumstance.

5:00

As I mentioned earlier, Motion 518 calls on the government to conduct a policy review to study how we can make autoinjectors more publicly available. The entities chosen for the study were picked deliberately, with maximum effectiveness in mind. School bus carriers are responsible for transporting children, many of whom have severe allergies. With the existing system of stocking epinephrine in schools, making it accessible on buses would ensure children are protected from the time they leave for school until they make it home. Fire department and EMS operators are first responders who make it to an emergency before paramedics. Having epinephrine available for these professionals will enhance their already life-saving abilities.

Businesses, particularly food service providers, serve customers who could face unexpected severe allergic reactions. Access to epinephrine in these settings would increase public safety and give both the businesses and the customers peace of mind.

Through this policy review the government would collect the best information possible for any future decision. As legislators we have a duty to make decisions that are effective, cost-efficient, and sustainable. While this motion is nonbinding on the government, it is a critical step because the methods we use to increase epinephrine accessibility will likely vary from entity to entity. For example, training programs on proper autoinjector use can be integrated into existing first aid training for first responders while a different approach may be needed for other types of employees.

We must also consider that we are not the only jurisdiction working to increase protections for those vulnerable to anaphylaxis. Through this policy review we will be able to examine best practices from other jurisdictions where they have successfully implemented policies to increase public access to epinephrine.

I'm very proud to be part of a government committed to the safety and well-being of all Albertans. By taking this step now, we will reinforce our province's position as a leader in public health and emergency preparedness. I'd like to ask for support from this Chamber for this critical initiative.

A final note. Remember: blue to the sky, orange to the thigh. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before the Assembly is Motion Other than Government Motion 518. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has risen.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this afternoon to speak to Motion 518. I note that it is a motion that I think all members in this Assembly would be willing to support because, of course, it adds to the number of entities and places where EpiPens would be made available; namely, businesses, municipal fire departments, emergency medical services operators, and school bus carriers. But I will ask: why stop there? There are other examples of places and jurisdictions there. Any gathering place of over a thousand people has the availability of an EpiPen, so I'm wondering why indeed the member and the motion stop there at only adding these four entities.

But I am pleased to know that the motion does entertain the concept of the EpiPen as a life-saving injection. This is a rather novel idea for members opposite, who typically don't do anything more than say that life-saving injections are available but don't do anything to promote them. Our Health minister will suggest, Mr. Speaker, to Albertans that flu vaccinations and other vaccinations are available, but they certainly don't do anything to promote these individual life-saving injections. Yet with this one there's a glaring inconsistency in government policy in that now this motion, supported by government members, is one that does actually say that a life-saving injection is something we support and we recognize that it should be promoted, unlike what they do with vaccinations.

I'm wondering if maybe this glaring inconsistency in government policy would be something the members might want to rectify to make it consistent, perhaps with a medical alert pen that would allow the person who is suffering an anaphylactic shock to maybe opt out of getting this life-saving injection. That indeed is what happens with other life-saving injections that this Health minister and this government make available to Albertans but don't promote.

Here today we're having one that is actually promoted, and I agree that it is a life-saving injection. EpiPens should be widely distributed throughout the province in more places than what Motion 518 contemplates adding to it, four more places on top of schools. What about hockey arenas? What about any place where people gather for a concert or any type of event where there might be somebody who goes into an anaphylactic shock as a result of a food allergy?

This inconsistency is something that I wondered if the members opposite had actually thought about when moving to support this motion, because the inconsistency is glaring when you look at this life-saving measure, this life-saving injection of an EpiPen, epinephrine, used as an antidote to anaphylactic shock. It is a public health responsibility that the government members are taking, as they should, yet when it comes to other types of life-saving injections, there seems to be a requirement to have an opt-out clause on top of it, respecting the so-called rights of refusal and individual rights.

The public health responsibility seems to be lost on them when it comes to vaccinations, yet here is a glittering example of why indeed the life-saving injections should be something that is actually promoted by the government rather than just simply being made available for those who wish to opt in. I mean, can you imagine a situation, Mr. Speaker, where somebody who was suffering an anaphylactic shock had a MedicAlert bracelet saying:

no, don't give that epinephrine to me; I'm opting out of that; don't save my life. That's unthinkable, isn't it? Well, the same thing can actually apply to vaccinations and other life-saving injections as well.

I just thought I'd point that out while speaking in support of the motion to add the four different entities or places where the EpiPens would be made available by Motion 518 on top of the schools, where it's already made available. It certainly does reveal a glaring inconsistency in policy on the part of the government when it comes to their support for life-saving injections when you compare EpiPens to their policy with respect to vaccinations in general.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I think that I'll conclude my remarks and leave that on the table for further discussion.

Mrs. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to stand in the House and speak on this motion from the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. This important motion urges the government to undertake a policy review with the objective of expanding protections for Albertans at the risk of anaphylaxis caused by severe, life-threatening allergic reactions. Specifically, it seeks to assess the feasibility of increasing the availability and use of epinephrine autoinjectors by businesses, fire departments, EMS operators, and school bus carriers.

I appreciate the member's concern in bringing this motion forward because this issue deserves more attention. Mr. Speaker, an allergic reaction is life threatening. Just like asthma or a heart attack, severe allergic reactions can be fatal within just a few minutes. The Emergency Medical Aid Act and related regulations already support the placement of AEDs in public places, and the workplace health and safety code mandates AEDs in workplaces with high health risks in Alberta. Given these precedents, it only makes sense to consider whether additional measures should be taken to address anaphylaxis in public and high-risk settings. I believe that government should reassess current policies, conduct comprehensive research, and analyze the results as this could reveal a critical public safety gap in our province.

Mr. Speaker, in order to support this motion, I believe it's necessary to provide detailed statistics so that all members on both sides of the aisle can fully understand the urgency and the importance of this issue. In 2014 a national survey revealed that the majority of Canadians at risk for a severe, potentially fatal allergic reaction do not carry their life-saving medication with them. Even more concerning is that most Canadians would not know what to do if someone were experiencing an anaphylactic reaction.

5:10

The survey of 1,502 Canadians commissioned by King Pharmaceuticals in collaboration with anaphylaxis Canada found that only 1 in 5 at-risk Canadians remembers to carry an epinephrine autoinjector at all times. Additionally, while 97 per cent of Canadians are aware that an allergic reaction can be fatal, only 45 per cent would know how to administer a life-saving dose of epinephrine using an emergency autoinjector. So this seems like a good time to remind everyone: it's blue to the sky, orange to the thigh. Allow me to say that again: blue to the sky, orange to the thigh.

The survey also highlighted widespread misconceptions about allergies. Seventy-five per cent of Canadians believe that peanuts cause more severe allergic reactions than milk despite both having the potential to cause life-threatening anaphylaxis. While 60 per cent of Canadians support a peanut ban in schools and child care centres, only 27 per cent support such a ban in all public places. It's important to note that peanut allergies remain the most common

cause of fatal food allergy reactions along with allergies to shellfish, fish, and tree nuts.

Instead of throwing out more numbers, I think it's more important to think about this issue on a micro level. Mr. Speaker, imagine a beautiful summer day when you and your daughter are out enjoying an ice cream from a food truck. Suddenly your daughter starts wheezing, her throat tightens, and her skin breaks out in hives. Maybe your daughter forgot her autoinjector. Maybe it's expired. Maybe this is the first time your daughter has had an allergic reaction. Unfortunately, unless someone nearby is carrying an autoinjector, it is unlikely that a business, restaurant, or municipal building nearby will have one to help your daughter. In those critical moments every second matters, and without immediate intervention anaphylaxis can be fatal.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that the scenario I just described may seem far fetched, but it doesn't mean we should ignore the risk. Every one preventable death is too many. We must not allow bureaucracy or a lack of awareness to stand in the way of saving lives. No family should have to endure the loss of a loved one due to a preventable situation. If our policies do not support quick access to life-saving medication, we're failing Albertans.

Expanding the availability of epinephrine autoinjectors in Alberta is not just a theoretical discussion; it's about real people, real lives, and real emergencies that happen every day. The reality is that allergic reactions can occur anywhere: at school, daycare, restaurant, workplace, sports arena, or even in public transit. Not everyone at risk of anaphylaxis carries their autoinjector at all times, and in those first, critical moments having one available nearby could mean the difference between life or death.

While most cases of anaphylaxis are not fatal, we can still do more to prevent the worst from happening. The question is not whether we should act but how soon we can take meaningful steps to protect Albertans. Of course, I acknowledge that increasing the availability of epinephrine autoinjectors comes with logistical and financial challenges. Costs, distribution, and training are all factors to consider. However, public safety should always be a priority. The government can explore cost-effective ways to ensure that autoinjectors are placed strategically in high-risk locations without creating excessive financial burdens. Grants, public-private partnerships, or community initiatives could help make this a reality.

Education is also key. Having autoinjectors available is important, but we must also ensure that people know how to use them. Just as we have CPR and AED training, we can implement educational programs to teach the public, business owners, and front-line workers how to recognize anaphylaxis and then administer epinephrine correctly. This knowledge can empower bystanders to step in and save a life when every second counts.

Mr. Speaker, expanding the availability of epinephrine autoinjectors is a necessary step in protecting Albertans from life-threatening allergic reactions. We have seen in other jurisdictions how such policies can save lives. For example, in the United States states like Illinois, Maryland, and Virginia have enacted laws allowing businesses, restaurants, and public venues to stock epinephrine autoinjectors for emergency use. These laws were implemented in response to real-life tragedies, instances where individuals suffered fatal allergic reactions simply because the necessary, life-saving medication was not available. Alberta should not wait for a similar tragedy to occur before we take action. By conducting a policy review, we can determine the most effective ways to expand access to epinephrine autoinjectors in public spaces and ensure that those at risk of anaphylaxis have the best possible chance of survival in an emergency.

To conclude, I'd like to once again thank the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville for bringing this important motion forward. Anaphylaxis is a life-threatening condition, and it's time we address the gaps in our system. By working together, we can create a province where every Albertan has access to the emergency care they need no matter where they are when a crisis strikes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McDougall: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to support this vital motion, Motion 518, calling on the government of Alberta to undertake a policy review on expanding the availability of epinephrine autoinjectors in public spaces. This motion is about saving lives and ensuring that no Albertan suffering from a severe allergic reaction is left without immediate access to life-saving medication. It's about protecting our children, our families, and every individual who is vulnerable to anaphylaxis.

I'm told of an incident years back involving a young boy who suffered a severe allergic reaction at a public event. His mother had always been diligent about carrying an epinephrine autoinjector, but on this day, in the rush to leave the house, she forgot it. Within minutes of consuming a meal that unknowingly contained traces of peanuts, he struggled to breathe. Panic set in as those around him searched desperately for a solution. Paramedics arrived, but precious minutes had already been lost. Fortunately, he survived, but the situation could have ended in tragedy and certainly caused the family a lot of unnecessary stress.

Mr. Speaker, this motion is not just important to me but to many families who have lost loved ones due to the lack of immediate access to epinephrine. One such tragic case is 12-year-old Maia Santarelli-Gallo from Stoney Creek, Ontario. Maia had a severe peanut allergy, and in 2013 she suffered a fatal anaphylactic reaction while at Burlington's Mapleview shopping centre with her family and friends. Despite efforts to save her, she did not receive the EpiPen in time. Her death was heartbreaking, a reminder of the urgent need of widespread availability of epinephrine in public spaces. Following this tragedy the city of Hamilton took decisive action, becoming a leader in public availability of autoinjectors. They ensured that city-owned facilities, including community centres and recreation halls, had epinephrine autoinjectors available for emergency use. Their proactive approach set a precedent that others should follow.

The experience is not unique. Across Alberta thousands of families live in constant fear of anaphylaxis. Anaphylaxis is unpredictable, and while those with known allergies may carry their medication, emergencies can strike unexpectedly, and bystanders may not always be prepared. The reality is that a delay of even a few minutes in administering epinephrine can reduce the chances of survival. Expanding the availability of epinephrine autoinjectors in key public spaces is not just an improvement; it is a necessity. Allergic reactions are common yet do not receive the attention they truly deserve.

I want to extend my appreciation to my colleague the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville for bringing forward this motion. This motion builds upon her previous work with Bill 201, the Protection of Students with Life-threatening Allergies Act. The act, passed in 2019 but came into force in January 2020, requires publicly funded school boards to stock epinephrine in every school for emergency use, making Alberta the first province in Canada to mandate such a life-saving measure. Now my honourable friend is taking the next step by advocating for a broader policy review that would extend similar requirements to other entities that regularly interact with the public: businesses, municipal fire departments, emergency medical service operators, and school bus carriers, among others.

This motion recognizes the urgent need to expand access to epinephrine beyond school settings, ensuring that those most at risk have immediate access to life-saving intervention wherever they may be.

Anaphylaxis is a rapid and severe allergic reaction that affects multiple systems in the body. It can occur within minutes of exposure to allergens such as food, insect stings, medication, and latex. The only effective immediate treatment is epinephrine, which reverses the symptoms and prevents fatal outcomes. The problem is that access to epinephrine is often limited to individuals who carry personal autoinjectors.

5:20

Other jurisdictions have recognized this public safety gap and have successfully implemented policies to increase the availability of epinephrine autoinjectors in public spaces. Ontario, for example, has stock epinephrine programs in several municipalities, ensuring that security personnel in shopping centres and city-owned facilities have access to the medication. By expanding the public's access to epinephrine injections, we can avoid deaths and provide immediate care when seconds count.

The entities listed in this motion – businesses, municipal fire departments, EMS operators, and school bus carriers – are in frequent contact with individuals at risk of anaphylaxis. Their ability to administer epinephrine swiftly can save lives. Consider school buses, where children may normally be exposed to allergies. If a child reacts while in transit, waiting for emergency responders may prove fatal. Similarly, businesses, particularly in the food industry, serve customers who may unexpectedly experience severe allergic reactions. Fire departments and EMS operators are often the first to arrive at emergencies, and having epinephrine readily available would significantly enhance their ability to provide immediate assistance. Delaying the administration of epinephrine increases the risk of complications, hospitalization, and in some cases, fatality.

The need for broader accessibility is clear, and Alberta has an opportunity to lead by example. As leaders we must take a proactive approach to public safety. This motion is not just about responding to emergencies. It's about ensuring that we are ready before they occur. Equipping high-risk environments with epinephrine autoinjectors is a responsible and forward-thinking measure that will safeguard our communities.

This is particularly true for schools. Alberta has already taken an important step with the passage of Bill 201, requiring a stock of epinephrine in schools. However, we must build on this progress. The expansion of stock epinephrine programs beyond schools and into public spaces is the next logical step in our commitment to public safety.

The feasibility of implementing this policy is evident. Training programs can be incorporated into existing first aid certification courses, ensuring that employees and first responders are adequately equipped to use epinephrine autoinjectors. The cost of stocking epinephrine injectors in businesses and emergency response units is minimal compared to the cost of human life.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has always been a province that prioritizes the well-being of its citizens. By supporting this motion, we reaffirm our commitment to the health and safety of all Albertans. This motion is about being proactive rather than reactive, ensuring that no one loses their life because epinephrine was not available when they needed it most. The tragic loss of Maia Santarelli-Gallo should serve as a sobering reminder of what is at stake; she may still have been alive today if she had received the needed epinephrine autoinjector.

Every second counts in an anaphylactic emergency, and every Albertan deserves the security of knowing that life-saving treatment is within reach. Let us take decisive action to protect our children, our seniors, and all those at risk. Let us continue to lead the way for other provinces in public health and emergency preparedness, setting a standard that puts the safety of all Albertans first.

I urge my colleagues in this House to support this motion. Together we can ensure that no family endures the devastating loss of a loved one due to the lack of access to a simple life-saving intervention. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on Motion Other than Government Motion 518, are there others?

Seeing and hearing none, I am prepared to call on the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville to close debate.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise again in support of Motion 518 and to provide closing remarks. It's been very refreshing to hear the productive discussion in the Chamber on the policy review that Motion 518 proposes. Thoughtful debates like this are key to ensuring that the policies we propose are practical, sustainable, and truly serve the needs of Albertans.

I know many of you are familiar with my passion for this subject and, having heard some of your testimonies, I'm reassured that we are on the right track with this motion. An average of 3,500 Canadians will experience anaphylactic shock every year. If passed, this motion would put Alberta on the path to being a safer place for those at risk of joining that statistic.

It is not an exaggeration to say that epinephrine autoinjectors are a lifeline for people with severe allergies. As someone with severe food allergies and allergies in general, keeping one on my person is how I find myself having peace of mind. But what if you go out and forget it? What if it's expired? What if it's faulty? Beyond these possibilities, it is important to consider that many people have a severe allergy but don't know it, and you can't protect yourself from something you don't know. By increasing the availability of these autoinjectors among entities that interact with the public, we protect

the public from those possibly disastrous scenarios. I'm glad to say that Motion 518 proposes to move forward on this subject in a sensible way.

As I spoke to stakeholders and Albertans concerned about the threat of severe allergies, a lot of questions emerged: "How would the deployment of epinephrine autoinjectors differ from entity to entity? What would the associated costs be? How are they approaching the issue elsewhere in the world? How can we ensure expired autoinjectors deployed in public spaces are replaced?" and more. That's why the feasibility study proposed in Motion 518 is so critical. This is something we want to get right, Mr. Speaker, and with Motion 518 we will get it right.

With that, I close debate. Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 518 carried]

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

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much for all the work we've done today. I'd like to adjourn till tomorrow at 1:30.

The Speaker: Hon. members, prior to calling the question, I would like to remind the hon. members in the Assembly that the legislative policy committees will convene this evening and tomorrow morning for consideration of the main estimates. This evening the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Tourism and Sport in the Grassland Room, and the Standing Committee on Families and Communities will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction in the Rocky Mountain Room.

Tomorrow morning the Standing Committee on Families and Communities will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Education in the Rocky Mountain Room, and the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Immigration and Multiculturalism in the Grassland Room.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:27 p.m.]

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