



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, March 17, 2025

Day 86

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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

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Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
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Boitchenko, Andrew, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
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Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
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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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Sigurdson, L.
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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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Al-Guneid
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Boitchenko
Calahoo Stonehouse
Dyck
Eggen
Hunter
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 17, 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 interests and prejudices, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all. Amen.

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 Haley Quiring with the support of her mom. 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.

[Standing ovation]

The Speaker: I can say with some high level of confidence that the 2025 cutest anthem singer of the year goes to Ms Haley Quiring.

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.

Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's my pleasure to introduce a visitor to you today. Visiting us is former member of the Manitoba Legislature Mr. Jon Reyes, who is seated with his wife, Cynthia, in the Speaker's gallery. Jon Reyes was first elected as MLA for St. Norbert, Manitoba, in 2016, becoming the first Canadian-born person of Filipino descent elected to the Manitoba Legislature. Jon was re-elected as MLA for Waverley in 2019 and served for two terms. In his term as an elected official Jon served as the Minister of Labour and Immigration, the minister of advanced education, skills, and immigration, and the minister of economic development and jobs. Prior to being elected, Jon served in the Canadian military for 10 years. I invite you to please both rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have already mentioned our anthem singer today, but a very important person led us in the singing of *O Canada*. Ms Haley Quiring attends kindergarten at Joseph M. Demko school in St. Albert. She is five years old and developed a love of music very early on and is now known for singing everywhere she goes. Haley is accompanied by her mother, Amy Quiring. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has a school group to introduce.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce the grade 6 students and their teacher Mackenzie McMillan from J.H. Picard school in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Strathcona. I would ask them to rise and please receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you 64 students from John A. McDougall school here with their teacher Victoria Lessard. I have the wonderful opportunity to visit them at least once a year to read to them during Read In Week, and it is always a pleasure, and they always have excellent questions. I ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has a school group to introduce.

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very, very pleased to rise and introduce to you and through you some really fabulous students from St. Elizabeth Seton school, who are here today for a whole week of enjoyment with School at the Legislature. They're here today with their teacher Dani Veldman. Would you please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members Meghan Kiist. Meghan is a placement student from the MacEwan school of social work, and I'm very grateful that she's assisted with hundreds of constituents since September and helped with our annual Mill Woods Resource Fair. I invite her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to rise today to introduce two fabulous social work practicum students who are working in my office. They'll be fantastic social workers once they finish their program of study. I ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you two first-year practicum students from MacEwan University who are doing their practicum out of my office. Conor McNally and Noah Mascarenhas, if you could please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly the senior rabbi

and spiritual leader of congregation Beth Shalom in Edmonton, Rabbi Alisa Zilbershtein. It was my pleasure to host her today here in the Legislature to talk about our shared efforts in supporting newcomers in Alberta. Please rise, Rabbi, and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Dyck: Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to introduce to you representatives from the Grande Spirit Foundation. Joining us today are Steve Madden, chief administrative officer; Alvin Hubert, vice chair and councillor for Saddle Hills county; and Karen Rosvold, board member and councillor for the county of Grande Prairie. They do great work. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Al-Guneid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you Lauren Duiven, a constituency assistant in Calgary-Glenmore. She's bright, she's wonderful, and she represents the riding in the best way possible. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Member Boparai: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Jaswinder Kang, here with his wife, Kulwinder Kang. He is a successful businessman and owner of Era Kitchens and Era Granite. He is dedicated to giving back to the community, supporting programs such as free kitchen, blood donation drives, sports, and more. I ask that they rise to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you I'd like to introduce leaders in the social work community: Jody-Lee Farrah, who is the executive director of the Alberta College of Social Workers; Keslin Park, a director also at ACSW; Arlene Eaton-Erickson, the president of the Social Workers Association of Alberta; and Angela Fawcett, the executive director of the Social Workers Association. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Member Ceci: Additional social workers to announce. I hope they can stand as I call their name: Paula Cornell, MSW, RSW, chair of the social work program at NorQuest College; Lina Chinchilla, BSW, RSW, who is currently working in MLA Sigurdson's constituency office; and, last, Joseph Paul De Leon, BSW, RSW, who is a recent graduate of the University of Calgary. Please all stand.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo knows that the use of the proper name of any member of the Assembly would be wildly inappropriate.

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

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce some of the family of our young anthem singer, Haley, today. Proud opa and oma Dirk and Mary Velthuisen and her younger brother Jayden Quiring are seated in the gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Budget 2025 Infrastructure Funding

Mr. McDougall: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is growing at an unprecedented rate, and our government is taking bold action to ensure

our infrastructure keeps up. Budget 2025 invests over \$8.5 billion in roads, bridges, and critical water infrastructure because when Alberta builds, Alberta thrives. This is a \$334 million increase compared to Budget 2024. We are making major investments in Calgary of over \$2.1 billion, another \$2 billion in Edmonton, both dedicated projects that will ease congestion and keep families and businesses moving.

Alberta's government has allocated \$3.9 billion for capital grants to municipalities over the next three years. This includes funding for LRT projects in Edmonton and Calgary and support to bring Calgary's Blue Line LRT extension closer to the Calgary International Airport. A total of \$5 million in new funding is also included in Budget '25 to support planning work on a new transit solution connecting Calgary's airport terminal with the future Blue Line LRT extension station.

We're also prioritizing our rural communities with over \$4 billion in infrastructure upgrades across the province, ensuring every Albertan benefits from safe and efficient transportation corridors. This includes \$509.7 million over three years in grants for municipal water and waste-water infrastructure in small and rural communities across the province. Of this, \$126.8 million over three years is for the strategic transportation infrastructure program to support municipalities in improving critical local transportation infrastructure, and \$163.8 million over three years is for water management infrastructure projects.

Our commitment is clear. We are building for growth, strengthening our economy, and keeping Alberta the best place to live, work, and raise a family. This is what responsible, forward-thinking leadership looks like. I am proud to be part of a government that gets it done.

Thank you.

Investigation of Health Services Procurement

Member Hoyle: Albertans still deserve a judicial-led public inquiry. The minister released her statement of defence, and it only created more questions. Her statement doesn't address the serious allegations of kickbacks that the Deputy Minister of Finance said were being rumoured throughout the public service. It doesn't mention why the head of chartered surgical procurement had an e-mail address at Sam Mraiche's medical company while also working for AHS, buying expensive goods from that same company. It ignores why Alberta Surgical Group, another company linked to Mraiche, secured hundreds of millions in bloated government contracts.

It also omits the serious claims from the former Minister of Infrastructure, who resigned from cabinet because of the corrupt behaviour he witnessed of potential criminal activity around the corrupt care scandal well beyond AHS and the Ministry of Health. He said, "In recent months, I have voiced concerns regarding the Government of Alberta's procurement . . . across all departments." In fact, the statement doesn't explain how Mraiche was able to make a \$300,000 profit in just three months by flipping a single piece of property to the government at an inflated price.

Mr. Speaker, there is no transparency or accountability in this UCP government. When you couple the minister's statement of defence with the 'shamvestigations' into the corrupt care scandal, you see just how unethical and corrupt this government has become. Alberta needs a public inquiry to uncover the full truth and hold all parties accountable. Without it, Albertans will only get partial details and selective disclosures, not a comprehensive picture. Albertans deserve the truth. We need a full, independent inquiry now.

Investment in Northern Alberta

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government is absolutely charging ahead in its unwavering commitment to the growth and prosperity of northern and regional economies. Our budget is phenomenal, recognizing the north as the important piece of Alberta's economy that it truly is. The northern regional economic development program is the crown jewel of these investments, with \$9 million allocated over the next three years to fuel job creation, stimulate business expansion, and drive economic diversification in the region. We're talking about an infusion of resources that will supercharge the local economy.

The northern Alberta development bursary program has received an exceptional boost with an additional \$450,000 added in '24-25, bringing the total to an eye-popping \$2.32 million. This funding will support more than 310 students, who will become the future leaders, engineers, health care professionals, and educators of the north.

Let's also not forget the massive infrastructure investments that are transforming the north, with \$101 million allocated to critical projects like the twinning of highway 63 and the paving of highway 686 between Peerless Lake and Trout Lake, with plans to extend it right to Fort McMurray. These projects are game changers for connectivity, accessibility, and providing northern Alberta with the foundation to grow into a modern, robust, and future-ready economy.

That's only scratching the surface, Mr. Speaker. The government's focus on workforce development, with multimillion-dollar investments in skills training, apprenticeship programs, and physician recruitment, is set to bring a new wave of skilled workers to the north. The \$189 million for the replacement health centre in Beaverlodge is direct proof of this, not to mention an additional \$50 million for recruitment and retention of physicians in underserved areas.

Through these vital investments Alberta's government is not only supporting northern communities; it is revolutionizing the future of northern and regional economies. Every initiative, every dollar invested, every project under way is a testament to the government's unshakable belief in the north. Alberta is roaring into the future with unmatched energy, and the north is at the epicentre of this spectacular growth. Get ready because the best is yet to come.

Happy St. Patrick's Day, Mr. Speaker.

Social Work Week

Ms Sigurdson: March 17 to 21 is Social Work Week in Alberta. The theme this year is Connections: Fostering Networks and Driving Positive Change. Having been a registered social worker for over 30 years, I know first-hand the amazing work that is done by our profession. Social workers serve in large government departments, small nonprofits, corporations, private practice, and even, like me, as politicians. I'm so proud to be part of a political party that has values consistent with my profession. It's obvious here in Alberta that this is true, as five members of the NDP caucus have educational diplomas or degrees in social work.

Hard-working social workers compassionately support vulnerable Albertans. We may work in health care, ensuring access and support to those experiencing medical challenges. We are champions for strong public health care. We may work in child welfare agencies, private practice, and government departments, serving families. We listen and develop understanding of the difficulties faced and work to mitigate them. We believe in inclusivity. Indigenous people, the pride community, seniors, newcomers, women, and girls all deserve access to resources and opportunities to live with dignity.

All social workers look at the big picture. We ask questions like: what's missing in our society that would improve the situation? What public programs are needed to create fairness and justice? How can we connect with other professions like teachers, nurses, and doctors to ensure they understand the challenges vulnerable Albertans face?

During Social Work Week I encourage all my MLA colleagues on both sides of the aisle to recognize the transformative work of social workers in our province. The ministers of Children and Family Services, Health, and Seniors, Community and Social Services are uniquely positioned to honour the registered social workers in their ministries. This acknowledgement shows that you value our work.

Thank you to the over 10,000 registered social workers in our province. The suffering of our citizens has been lessened by your dedication, compassion, and expertise.

Tariffs on Canadian Products

Mr. Wiebe: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to speak about tariffs. In my view, the word "tariffs" is not a beautiful word. It is not an effective tool for protecting domestic industry nor a reliable source of government revenue. Instead, tariffs create uncertainty, disrupt markets, and put livelihoods at risk.

With over 40 years in the transportation industry I learned that competitiveness drives success. It fuels innovation, lowers consumer costs, and ensures the highest quality products. However, the persistent changes on tariffs do not foster competition; they strangle it. Imagine being a small-business owner waking up every morning to news that the United States has decided to raise your costs by 25 to 50 per cent. How can you plan? How can you run a business? How do farmers know what to plant this spring when uncertainty looms over every decision? This issue is not just about political decisions; it has consequences for hard-working Albertans. Energy workers, forestry workers, farmers, ranchers, and small businesses are paying the price.

1:50

The Americans are not alone when it comes to creating trade barriers. China has now imposed a 100 per cent tariff on canola oil and peas along with a 25 per cent tariff on pork. China is a key market for Canadian canola, representing nearly \$5 billion in export value. Their tariffs should deeply concern all Albertans. We will disproportionately suffer from these tariffs.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's economy depends on free and fair trade. Tariffs only hurt our industries, increase costs for consumers, and create uncertainty for businesses. We must continue to stand up for workers, fight for market access, push back against policies that put Alberta jobs at risk. Alberta wants stability, not a trade war.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

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

Health Services Procurement Process

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the former CEO of AHS says that she spent months rooting out problems with bloated contracts before this government fired her. She says that the Minister of Health "complained that it was taking too long for me to sign contracts for chartered surgical facilities. She said some contracts may have been '[S-word]'; but 'there's a lot of [S-word] contracts out there in AHS and in government . . . and we have to live with it.'" Now, in this

quote “S-word” is a colourful but unparliamentary term that I’ve often heard used to describe this government. To the Premier: does she agree with her Health minister that Albertans have to put up with S-word contracts in the health care system?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that we don’t put up with employees who call people F-word T-words either.

I can tell you that when we went and looked at the allegations from the former CEO, we took them very seriously. It’s the reason why we have started an investigation. We have an external review being done by the Chief Justice of Manitoba in addition to an additional look at the information from the Auditor General. We also have the statement of defence that has been filed with the court, and I encourage the members opposite to read it in full.

Ms Gray: The Premier is awfully proud of all the ways they’re being investigated, Mr. Speaker.

The former AHS CEO says, “It grieves me that [the Premier and minister] have accused me of trying to defy government policy and direction.” This government is attacking in court a 30-year public servant that they recruited to run AHS. Instead of looking into corruption, the Health minister was pushing hard for AHS to sign contracts that she knew were not in the public interest. The members opposite are sitting on their hands while tax dollars are wasted. Why go to these lengths to benefit one company with ties far too close to the Premier’s office and inner circle?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a policy decision that was made a number of years ago, even predating us, even predating them, to use chartered surgical facilities in order to increase the number of surgeries and reduce wait times. In fact, it’s the only part of the system that is doing that. We have given AHS 3 and a half billion dollars more. They’re doing fewer surgeries today than they did six years ago. Meanwhile chartered surgical facilities have gone from 40,000 surgeries to 62,000 surgeries, and that’s the reason why we’re going to continue to use them.

Ms Gray: The issue is this government’s political interference.

Now, the former CEO says, “I came to realize that my career would end either because I went along with this government, or because I did not.” Dr. Paul Parks, former AMA head, says, quote: “Who would ever want to work in this environment? You must follow orders from government even if you know they are counter to good care or may even be criminal.” End quote. The Premier can no longer just sweep this under the rug of the corrupt care scandal. Will she cancel her dog-and-pony show that nobody trusts? Call a real public inquiry now.

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

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you talk to any patients who have gone through a chartered surgical facility, they talk about the care being excellent. Part of the reason it’s excellent is because all of the staff are able to specialize in being able to deliver those surgeries. They develop a fast way of being able to deliver the surgeries and get more of them through. That’s part of the reason why we’ve seen the kind of results that we’ve had, a 50 per cent increase in the number of surgeries being done at chartered surgical centres. We’re going to continue to use that as a matter of policy,

and that is foundationally what the dispute has been with the leadership at AHS.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Investigation of Health Services Procurement

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the chief financial officer of AHS wrote to MHCare in December asking them why Mr. Prasad had an e-mail address at that company. The Premier has claimed repeatedly that she had no knowledge of these problems, but we now know that AHS was trying to get to the bottom of this back in December. It blows the Premier’s defence out of the water. So here we are now, three months later. Did MHCare respond to that letter from December 20, and if so, what have they said?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s very clear the members opposite have not read the statement of defence, and I encourage them to do so. There is one side and a statement of claim accompanied by a demand for \$1.7 million, and then there is another side articulated in the statement of defence that talks about the reasons why we were very concerned about chartered surgical facilities not moving forward with the approvals. Chartered surgical facilities are a policy of government. We wanted to make sure that we have more ability to serve more patients and clear more of the backlog. That’s what we’re going to continue to do.

Ms Gray: To be clear, yes, the statement of defence has been read, and that statement of defence ignores that Jitendra Prasad was apparently working at AHS and MHCare at the same time. Imagine secretly working for both the buyer and the seller in any deal. If the Premier still hasn’t been briefed about it, it shows the government doesn’t care about the fact that Mr. Prasad had an MHCare e-mail address while also working for AHS. We know that AHS senior leadership, including the CEO, the board, the chief financial officer, were all extremely worried and trying to get to the bottom of this. Why isn’t the Premier?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, that’s exactly what we’re trying to get to the bottom of. The procurement process was and still is one hundred per cent controlled by AHS. As a result, if they have bad practices, then we want to make sure we don’t replicate those bad practices when procurement comes over into Acute Care Alberta, which it will on April 1. These are all allegations AHS is making against itself, so, yes, we absolutely do want to get to the bottom of it so that we can make sure we don’t replicate the same problems. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Ms Gray: To be clear, the allegations are political interference by this government and their ministers.

The government’s statement of defence just leaves us with more questions. It does not address allegations of political pressure, does not address the fact that the chief of staff was hunting down someone running a random Twitter account about a cat, and it doesn’t address MHCare e-mail accounts as one of the government’s own employees. This is why we need a real public inquiry. The public deserves full accounting for the entire corrupt care scandal. Will the Premier call a full public inquiry with the power to subpoena and with the power to compel evidence?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are having a judge-led public inquiry with the Chief Justice of Manitoba . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Smith: . . . able to interview whoever he likes, and we have indicated that we will help to facilitate any interviews that he would desire. In addition, all of the documents are being shared with the Auditor General at the exact same time. The report will be available on an interim basis in May, and it will be published online in June. Then we'll all be able to get to the bottom of the innuendo and allegation and gossip all mixed together to see if there's any wrongdoing that's been done, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Gray: Calling their sham a public inquiry is misleading to the public.

DynaLife Medical Labs Contract Termination

Ms Gray: Another major contract gone wrong shows that when it comes to business, this government is completely incompetent. The DynaLife mess has cost Albertans hundreds of millions of dollars, maybe even more. A new report shows that the government couldn't get lab services on time and at a reasonable price for Albertans. First they cancelled the public lab that would have saved Albertans money, and now this. What due diligence was done by the government before they signed Albertans up to a terrible contract with DynaLife?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the members opposite should take some comfort in knowing that if there is a contract that isn't working in the interest of taxpayers, we'll address it. We'll cancel it. That's exactly what I did in this circumstance when we started seeing that DynaLife was unable to fulfill its contract. It would have needed \$70 million more per year. That exceeded the amount that government had hoped to get in savings, so we ended up arranging so that we could take over their assets at a very small cost so that we could continue to get the care back to patients, where it belonged.

2:00

Ms Gray: What a relief, Mr. Speaker. The government will get to the bottom of their own bad contracts. That's great.

They signed a contract with a company that went bankrupt three months later. It cost Albertans plenty, \$100 million or more – \$100 million, Mr. Speaker – to bail out such a bad deal, but it's worse than that. When companies go belly up, they're usually sold for pennies on the dollar. What on earth was the government thinking when they felt compelled to pay full price for the bankrupt lab company?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what it is that the members opposite don't get. All of the contracts signed by AHS were negotiated by AHS, the terms agreed to by AHS. When I came in and saw that people were waiting an unduly long period of time to be able to get their medical lab work, I made the decision that we had to relieve DynaLife of its obligations, take over their assets, and take over the testing, and we ended up seeing an improvement as a result. This is an AHS contract. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Ms Gray: For six years they've had complete control over AHS, and now we've learned the Auditor General is having trouble getting all the information about the DynaLife contract. Now, when it comes to the corrupt care investigation, the government is saying: trust us; we'll get the Auditor General all the information he needs. But we are all deeply worried that this government is not going to hand over crucial information. The Infrastructure minister left his cabinet seat over it. How can Albertans trust that the Auditor General is going to get the information he needs to look into corrupt care when he can't get the information for DynaLife? How can they be this incompetent?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The numbers are very transparent. The DynaLife acquisition: AHS acquired approximately \$97 million in assets and paid DynaLife \$31.5 million, resulting in assumed liabilities of approximately \$66 million. The result: it worked. We went from increasing the number of treatments in Calgary from 16,766 to 40,734. That was a testament to the reason why we needed to make the change that we did. We made it quickly, we got the assets, and we were able to triple the amount of lab tests being done.

Health Services Procurement Process

(continued)

Ms Hoffman: The Health minister refused to answer questions about the employment status of J.P. Prasad in Health budget debate. She said: wait for the statement of defence. But it didn't even mention Mr. Prasad, his Turkish Tylenol con, or the warehouse full of PPE that's being called unsafe and rash provoking. It's a new week, so let's see if the government is ready now. Will the Premier please tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? Who did Mr. Prasad work for on December 6, 2022, when the Premier herself held the Turkish Tylenol press conference about her government's procurement process?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government of Alberta's statement of defence related to this AHS matter has been filed. As this matter is now before the courts, we refer you to the facts contained in the document if you have any further questions regarding this matter.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy to state that we have many positive things going on in health care, which the members opposite don't want to focus on, including the announcement that I made last week that we're actually going to add 700 new bed spaces to Edmonton.

Ms Hoffman: Clearly, corruption is alive and well in the UCP, and the government is more focused on trying to cover it up than getting to the bottom of it. In the December 6 press conference the Premier told everyone that the Turkish Tylenol wouldn't have been an option without her minister and department staff pushing for it to happen, so clearly the Premier knew that Mr. Prasad was a government employee. Was he properly hired, or did her guy Mr. Smith make sure that his guy Mr. Prasad was parachuted in to give hundreds of millions of dollars to MHCare and Sam Mraiche?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, once again nothing in that statement is accurate at all. The CEO was fired for being completely incompetent, unable to do her job, and misaligning with Albertans. The fact of the matter is that the statement of defence has been filed. It's made widely public to all Albertans to read, and that tells the

story of what actually happened in this particular case. The statement of defence is what we'll rely on to defend this case.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, government policy about procurement and government hiring practices are core government business. This employee was both working for a private company doing business with the government and the government. Everyone knows that that's wrong. This reeks of profiteering and exploitation. AHS was deeply worried about Mr. Prasad. Their chief financial officer wrote to MHCare on December 20 to get answers about why he was working both for government and for MHCare at the same time. What did the minister learn about Mr. Prasad when he was working for MHCare, and why hasn't she handed over the evidence to the RCMP already?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, incredibly rich from the former Minister of Health who told her employees and staff to go into voice mode so that nothing could be recorded.

The fact of the matter is that the statement of defence is very clear about the involvement of government officials, AHS officials, and the former CEO. The CEO was fired for being completely incompetent, not because of an investigation that was happening. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the former CEO actively concealed the results of that investigation, and that's exactly what the statement of defence alleges. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Premier's Appearance with Ben Shapiro

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, we should denounce when people say things like, "Arabs like to bomb crap and live in open sewage." Another quote: "Prevention is undoubtedly the only option if civilized nations wish to preserve their citizenries from the sadistic barbarism of our enemies. Monitoring mosques is the simplest and most effective way of preventing terrorist attacks." Does the government have a policy to denounce these wild statements? No decent government would associate themselves with such statements in any manner whatsoever.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, under no circumstances does this government or should any government around the world support any form of racism, xenophobia, or discrimination. I can tell you that this government is focused entirely on making sure the lives of all Albertans are better every day. That is why we come to this Chamber to work. That is why we follow the leadership of our Premier, to make sure that we're serving all Albertans in their best interests. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Sabir: Given that these quotes are from Ben Shapiro, an Islamophobe who hates Muslims, and given Ben Shapiro says that a majority of Muslims are radicals and hateful and given that Ben Shapiro will be speaking with the Premier in support of an extremist organization that downplays the history of slavery in North America and he even said that he wants to annex Canada, why is the Premier helping Ben Shapiro fund raise for this extremist hateful group? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Schow: Well, Mr. Speaker, to the best of my knowledge I've never once heard the Premier utter anything like the member opposite just said. The Premier believes in a strong Alberta and supporting Albertans of all races and colours.

What I can say is that in addition to that, in addition to leading this province forward through very difficult and uncertain times, the Premier has also spent a significant amount of her energy making sure we're clearing the way to get homes built in this province, leading with record-breaking houses in 2024. Mr. Speaker, our government's record is very clear. There is as well, and that's why they're on that side of the House.

Mr. Sabir: Given that Ben Shapiro continues to say harmful things about Muslims, given that Ben Shapiro is selling a \$25,000 table to extreme conservatives willing to hear the Premier as a fundraiser for an organization promoting these hateful views, given that this organization makes videos attacking Muslims, then they put those videos in schools to try to indoctrinate students with hatred against Muslims, will the Premier cancel her fundraiser with Ben Shapiro and apologize to Alberta's Muslim community? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, unlike the members opposite and Rachel Notley when she was leading the government our Premier has no problem meeting with people with whom she disagrees. The Premier is going down to meet with Mr. Shapiro for a number of reasons, not the least of which 25 million followers, to get our message out about Alberta but also because he's said: declaring a trade war on Canada under the terms of the USMCA, which he himself negotiated . . . [interjections]

2:10

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. the Government House Leader is the one with the call.

Mr. Schow: I continue.

. . . which he himself negotiated in Trump term 1, is not going to be a productive move for this administration. Mr. Speaker, we agree with that statement. Tariffs are not the way forward, and the Premier continues to make that case for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie has a question to ask.

Rural Infrastructure Funding

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's rural municipalities are extremely important to our province's identity and success. From driving Alberta's agriculture, forestry, and energy industries forward to producing good-paying jobs and an affordable cost of living, rural Alberta is the definition of the Alberta advantage and is truly the best place in our province to live, work, and raise a family. This makes it incredibly important that we continue supporting our rural municipalities. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: how is our government building the Alberta advantage in stronger communities in rural Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Our budget at Municipal Affairs will reach about \$1.4 billion to help municipal partners throughout Alberta build stronger, more resilient communities. The local government fiscal framework will reach \$820 million, a 13 per cent increase and almost \$100 million more than last year. On top of this, grants in place of taxes will go from 50 to 75 per cent this year on the way to 100, another \$17 million for rural municipalities, and the bulk of our capital program gets spent outside of Calgary and Edmonton. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many residents in rural communities depend on the public infrastructure that their municipalities provide them with, whether it's a community hall, a hockey rink, or a public park, and given that no rural municipalities have the same needs but have unique desires to build up their communities and further given that this government continues to support communities in rural Alberta with their unique needs, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: how does our Conservative government empower rural municipalities to deliver the infrastructure that meets the needs of their communities? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, I start with: I try to stay in touch with rural municipalities. I met with 10 of them this day and will meet with many more during the RMA conference. Nobody knows their communities better than the local leaders that residents elected. We know that the local leaders in all rural municipalities across Alberta are in many cases a little bit different, and we listen to them so we can react in an appropriate way. That's why we provide flexibility to our municipal partners, to identify, plan, and fund for the local municipalities that the locally duly elected people decide on.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his answer. Given that these public spaces that rural municipalities provide bring communities together and give opportunities for incredibly strong community spirit and given that these public spaces aren't useful for the communities unless we can help people get to them and given that rural Albertans often need to commute into town to access these services and public spaces, my question to the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors: can you please tell the House how you are supporting a safe and connected highway network that gets rural Albertans where they need to go? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors.

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to that member for the question. Alberta has \$75 billion total provincial road and bridge assets that we have to maintain. That's why this budget has an \$8.5 billion capital plan. It's 5 per cent higher when it comes to highway maintenance, 26 per cent higher when you compare it to the NDP. We're actually out there building the province. You compare that to the NDP and their virtual leader, Nenshi, who chose not to run in a by-election four months ago to actually sit in this Chamber. I guess he doesn't want to be in here because it would really affect his TikTok reel outside. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Investigation of Health Services Procurement

(continued)

Mr. Kasawski: When the latest allegations of kickbacks and corruption first appeared in the media, the government's initial response was silence for days. The Premier and Minister of Health were nowhere to be found. Since then, while Albertans have sought

answers from the government, they have been offered nothing. Last week they filed a statement of defence that does not address any of the major concerns around the corrupt care scandal. Will the Premier answer a simple question: when will she stop hiding and call a public inquiry?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's clear to me that member hasn't read the statement of defence either. In fact, it says everything that needs to be said. In the statement of defence it refutes all of the allegations of the statement of claim. It describes clearly and articulates the government's position. The former AHS CEO was fired for complete incompetence and being misaligned with what Albertans needed. Albertans want a strong health care system. That former CEO could not deliver, and that's why she was fired.

Mr. Kasawski: Given the Auditor General, the government's supposed third-party panel, and the RCMP have all opened investigations and given each of these are limited in scope compared to what a public inquiry will entail and given the Minister of Health has referred to AHS as, quote, a black box, a black box of their own making given that they've been in power for six years, to the Premier I ask: with rumours of corruption, kickbacks, and political interference, will you today commit to calling a public inquiry and let the light in?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member is well aware that there are multiple inquiries happening right now, including a judicial-led inquiry, including an Auditor General's investigation, including an RCMP investigation. There are many eyes on this issue. We're looking forward to hearing the results. The final report will be published online for everybody to see and read. When it comes to former Justice Wyant's report, we're looking forward to seeing that.

Mr. Kasawski: Given the cabinet minister resigned in objection to the corruption in this government, given the highly regarded 30-year career of the former AHS CEO and given she was appointed by this government to run the health care system and given the former AHS CEO stated, "I came to realize that my career would end either because I went along with this government, or because I did not," to the minister: can you explain in this House why you fired the AHS CEO, who was doing the job this minister hired her to do?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, the answer is well articulated once again in the statement of defence. The former AHS CEO was not aligned with the policy of Albertans. The surgical facilities have been operating in this province for decades. The former AHS CEO did not share the vision and put Albertans at risk. Albertans expect their health care to be available to them when they need it. That's what this government prioritizes.

Vaccination Policies

Member Miyashiro: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is facing measles outbreaks across the province, with confirmed cases in northern Alberta, exposure alerts in Calgary, Airdrie, and now Edmonton. Measles was once considered eradicated in Alberta, but it's once again on the rise and putting Alberta youth at risk of pneumonia, brain swelling, long-term health complications, and even permanent

disability. This government has supported dangerous rhetoric that has spread fear around vaccines to cater to their extreme antisience base. Will the minister now correct the record and tell Albertans that all vaccines are safe, they're tested, and they're effective at preventing horrible disease?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is correct in saying that measles is making a resurgence not just in Alberta, not just in Canada, but globally because there is vaccine hesitancy out there. We are continuing to inform Albertans to make sure that they can make the best decisions possible. We're doing it by many means. We encourage Albertans to make sure that they contact . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. the Minister of Health is the one with the call.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We encourage all Albertans to make sure they contact their primary care provider or 811 if they have any questions in this matter. We're going to continue to reach out to Albertans. As well, public health is interacting particularly with ISC, which is Indigenous Services Canada, on one of the issues.

Member Miyashiro: Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier wasted \$2 million on a dangerous report that directly attacks vaccines and undermines vaccine usage, given that the Alberta Medical Association calls the report "anti-science and anti-evidence" and spreads dangerous misinformation, and given that the World Health Organization and UNICEF have directly tied the spike in measles outbreaks to delays in routine vaccinations and misinformation, similar misinformation that's in the Premier's report, to the minister: will she stop playing politics with public health, denounce her own report, and support young Albertans getting vaccinated?

2:20

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the only people playing politics with children's health are the members opposite. We're going to continue to make sure that we give the information that Albertans need right now. The measles outbreaks that we're seeing are contained within families. We continue to have public health working with Indigenous Services Canada as well as two other locations within Alberta. We're going to continue to do that because it's the right thing to do. We are continuing to advise on immunizations, and we've got public health doing a fantastic job.

Member Miyashiro: Mr. Speaker, given that on March 9 the Member for Calgary-Lougheed hosted this government's second antivaccine town hall with the head of the controversial COVID task force along with support from the ridings of many of his colleagues and given that speaker after speaker at that event defended antisience, unproven treatments like ivermectin and spread misinformation and harmful comments about vaccine efficacy beyond COVID and given that UCP MLAs are helping spread dangerous rhetoric that undermines the efforts of health care professionals to prevent serious illness, will the Premier stand with health care workers and call for Albertans to get their measles vaccine so that . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government of Alberta does in fact recommend that children get the vaccine for measles. We're going to continue to recommend it. It is well proven

after many decades. In fact, currently in Alberta there are just 11 confirmed cases of measles that have been introduced from at least two international sites and one site in Ontario. The majority of cases are all contained. Actually, all the cases are contained within families, and we continue to work with Indigenous Services Canada on one of the largest . . .

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

Economic Development in Livingstone-Macleod

Mrs. Petrovic: Mr. Speaker, Livingstone-Macleod is a hub of economic opportunity built on sectors that have sustained families and businesses for generations, yet the members opposite have voiced opposition to continued industrial growth in my riding while simultaneously championing businesses in areas like Banff-Kananaskis. It's baffling that the members opposite acknowledge the economic importance of industry in their ridings but seek to hinder the same opportunities in Livingstone-Macleod, showcasing their political bias. Could the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade outline the supports and investment provided to my riding of Livingstone-Macleod?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Livingstone-Macleod is a region rich in opportunity, and our government is making significant investments to ensure it prospers now and into the future. For example, through the northern and regional economic development, or NRED, program we've supported over \$150,000 in projects to support local investment. This includes funding for the town of Claresholm's development by design project with a grant of more than \$50,000 to plan commercial and residential developments. We've also invested in the film and television tax credit, which has attracted \$44 million in economic input for six productions in that region, bolstering the film and television industry across Alberta. Additionally, we're investing in workforce development through programs like project hire in Pincher Creek . . .

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

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Livingstone-Macleod is home to hard-working families who depend on industry, whether it's resource development, manufacturing, farming, or ranching to sustain their livelihoods, and further given that these industries have long been the backbone of our economy, providing stable jobs, fostering local businesses, and ensuring food security for all of Albertans, to the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade: what steps is the government taking to ensure that regions like Livingstone-Macleod continue to attract and sustain industry?

Mr. Jones: Through a strategic investment and growth fund investment we've secured a \$28.5 million investment from Structural Truss Systems in Fort Macleod, supporting millions in economic input and securing valuable jobs. Additionally, we've supported training for work programs like the workforce training program in the Crownstest Pass, providing eight weeks of training with industry-recognized certifications for in-demand sectors like agriculture and oil field industries. We're also providing transitional funding to regional economic development organizations in the region, \$110,000 to Alberta southwest, \$125,000 to south, while leveraging our programs like the NRED film and television tax credit, regional economic development specialists and more.

Mrs. Petrovic: Mr. Speaker, given that industry is not only vital to the communities of Livingstone-Macleod but also to Alberta's broader economy, providing essential jobs, driving local growth, and ensuring long-term prosperity, and given that Livingstone-Macleod has immense potential for a diverse range of industries and given that reliable and affordable energy is essential to supporting industries and attracting investment, to the Minister of Energy and Minerals: how is the government ensuring that traditional and emerging industries in Livingstone-Macleod can thrive while promoting innovation and strong environmental stewardship? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Jean: What a great question from a great MLA, Mr. Speaker, that's representing her constituency. It's true. You can celebrate industry at the same time that you celebrate the environment. We can balance the two. While the NDP continue to try to kill jobs, try to kill investment in rural Alberta and right across Alberta, we here on this side of the House will continue to build Albertans and build families and build the economies that they all rely on. You can rely on us to do the right thing for Albertans.

Investigation of Police Response to Gaza Protests

Mr. Shepherd: Recently journalist Jeremy Appel obtained handwritten notes taken by Calgary police Chief Mark Neufeld following unprecedented police action against student protesters at the University of Calgary on May 9. The note showed that the next day, May 10, after the Premier praised the removal of students by police in riot gear, the chief took calls from no less than three UCP cabinet ministers and the Premier's chief of staff. Now, the minister of public safety told media at the time that, quote, law enforcement agencies are independent of government. To the minister: if law enforcement is independent, why was the chief getting calls from your cabinet colleagues and the Premier's staff?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, at no time are politicians to interfere with the operational decisions made by law enforcement. I stand by that. This is something that is a practice within this government and a practice that should be within all governments in Canada.

Mr. Shepherd: Given that Chief Neufeld's notes also state that three days after the encampment removal he received a call from the minister of public safety informing him he'd be ordering an ASIRT investigation but given that he then got a call from the Premier's chief of staff, Marshall Smith, who told him, quote, that ASIRT won't investigate but, it said, only determine if there was serious injury and given that while the minister is fond of saying that he wants police not to be seen as an arm of the state but as representatives of the communities they serve, but nothing says arm of the state like unelected political staff seemingly limiting the scope of an independent investigation, to the minister: who is in charge here, you or Marshall Smith?

Mr. Ellis: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the answer is pretty obvious. I'm in charge because an ASIRT investigation took place.

Mr. Shepherd: Now, given that limiting the scope of investigations to get the answers they want seems to be a bit of a habit for the UCP because given that's exactly what the Premier has done with the UCP's 'shamvestigation' into bloated health care contracts awarded to their government's friends, yet another scandal involving Marshall Smith, and given that it's abundantly clear that Albertans can't trust this Premier or government because whether it's health

care contracts or an ASIRT investigation, political interference is par for the course with the UCP, will the minister of public safety do the right thing in joining us in calling for a true public independent inquiry?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member can't have it both ways. Either we interfere and direct independent agencies from doing things, or we don't. On this side of the House we choose to allow them to do their jobs independent of government influence. The Auditor General will investigate independently, the RCMP will investigate independently, the former Chief Justice of Manitoba will investigate independently, and we will stand by those decisions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon has a question to ask.

Highway 686 Capital Plan

Mr. Boitchenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Moving people to safety during an emergency is a key priority for Alberta's government, especially in north Alberta, where wildfires pose a serious threat. This is why it is encouraging to see Budget 2025 invest \$311 million over three years to increase emergency route capacity in Alberta. Can the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors explain how extending highway 686 and other infrastructure projects in Alberta will enhance safety for our north?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of transportation.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that very important question. Obviously, safety for northern communities is a top priority for this government. That's why we're investing in highway 686. We have \$87 million going to the La Crete bridge in this budget. We have \$69 million being invested in highway 40, that's going between Hinton and Grand Cache; \$7 million for design work for La Loche connector, which will actually go from La Loche, Saskatchewan, into communities in Fort McMurray and in Alberta. There are so many northern projects, with \$1.25 billion being invested into the north, and we'll continue to get those projects built. [interjections]

2:30

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Boitchenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that wildfires have demonstrated the urgent need for more emergency routes in northern Alberta and further given the minister has stated that Budget '25 includes detailed design work for extending highway 686 between Peerless Lake and Fort McMurray that will support economic growth for north Alberta, can the same minister please tell the House how this investment will support economic growth in these resource-rich regions of our province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of transportation.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Highway 686 will be an incredible project when it gets built, finally, for communities. It's going to be a 215-kilometre project that's going to go through our beautiful boreal forest. It will connect so many communities across northern Alberta, from Peerless over to Fort McMurray. It will help not only folks in Fort McMurray but every community along the way have secondary egress for in case of wildfire and just being able to get to where they're going safely.

Highway 686 is really going to open up the north and going east, west, all across our . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boitchenko: Given that Budget 2025 also proposes funding for paving and upgrading highway 686 near Red Earth Creek and Peerless Trout First Nation and further given Chief Gilbert Okemow has stated that these investments are a direct response to his years of advocacy by his nation, can the same minister please explain how our government has worked together with First Nations to ensure that steps are being taken to maximize long-term benefits for their communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd actually like to thank the First Nations that have worked with the province of Alberta on highway 686. It was through their leadership and their initiative going out to their communities, talking to their people about the importance of highway 686 and what it could look like, that essentially empowered them to put, essentially, a line on the map that will show where this new highway will be built in northern Alberta. So I just wanted to thank the chiefs for their work, going out into their communities, consulting and engaging with them to make sure that when we build this road, we will build it right.

Arts and Culture Programming for Children

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, the every kid can play program provides funding to low-income families and nonprofit organizations to reduce financial barriers for sport and recreation programs. Every kid can play has received increased funding from the provincial government, including \$7 million last year and \$8 million this year. Meanwhile there is no such program to help kids engage in arts education and programming. To the minister of arts and culture: what are you doing to equitably support children's access to arts programs?

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

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is supporting children and youth in arts and culture in so many ways, from our investment in the member's riding for Arts Commons, which provides many programs for students, to the Winspear Centre. We also provided funding for them. They provide incredible programs for youth and children. Our record amount of funding as of 2026 for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts: also another amazing institution that provides funding to organizations that provide arts and culture funding for children and youth.

Member Ceci: Given that research shows that children who participate in arts programs achieve higher grades in the language arts, math, and overall GPA and given that kids who want to play sports can access the every kid can play program supported by provincial funding and given that financial barriers to participation in dance classes and music lessons can mean that some kids miss out on developing their artistic abilities, what is the minister of arts and culture doing to level the playing field, foster kids' participation in the artistic community, and treat artistic kids equitably across the province?

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

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In addition to the numerous examples I gave, we also through our community facility enhancement program and community initiatives program fund so many local community groups and organizations that provide all sorts of educational opportunities for children in arts, music, culture, entertainment. We're so proud of our CIP and CFEP programs. Millions of dollars to amazing organizations, many of whom I tour, and I get to meet the kids and see the amazing work that they do in arts and culture.

Member Ceci: Given that hundreds of millions of dollars were wasted on purchasing and warehousing defective PPE and nearly expired children's Tylenol and given that this government is occupied with charges of corruption in the corrupt care scandal and given that other provinces like Saskatchewan have had programs supporting kids who want to engage in the arts for nearly 20 years, why won't this minister work with the every kid can play program to ensure that provincial funding also supports kids who want to take lessons in music, dance, art, theatre, anything so that they can have the same opportunities as kids in sport?

Ms Fir: Mr. Speaker, I'll say again that I spend a great deal of my time touring and visiting with local community organizations that provide amazing programs for youth in arts and culture. Just this morning I was in Red Deer at the Red Deer Museum and Art Gallery with all sorts of kids running around in their green attire for St. Patrick's Day. I got to sit down and do some arts and crafts with them. I'll admit that my painting wasn't as good as theirs, but it was great to spend some time with them, hear their stories, and see the amazing art that they did. One is now hanging in my office.

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

Health Facilities in Northeast Edmonton

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every day I receive e-mails and calls from hurt constituents complaining about the state of health care in this province. They are waiting years for surgery and waiting hours for emergency care. Meanwhile allegations about corrupt UCP contracts that line certain pockets are all over the news, and this is a slap in the face of the suffering Albertans across this province. Can the minister please explain to my constituents why hundreds of millions of dollars are being spent on corrupt care and not on the Northeast health centre?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we are spending record numbers in health care. We are continuing to prioritize surgeries. We've gone from roughly 300,000 surgeries last year to 310,000. We aim to go to 316,500 in the '25-26 year. We're going to continue to prioritize facilities. We're going to make sure that we have facilities that meet the needs of Albertans where and when they need them.

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the shocking allegations that the UCP might have misspent public dollars meant for health care and given that Alberta Health was the target of the most new lobby registrations out of all the ministries in 2024 and given that this is not the first scandal on the government's use of health care funds, to the minister: why are the Albertans of northeast Edmonton without a hospital while hundreds of millions of dollars are being spent on corrupt care?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Budget 2025 includes \$154 million over three years for health capital projects in Edmonton, including \$21 million for relocating and expanding the genetics and genomics lab, \$11 million for completing the central drug production and distribution facility, \$51 million for the University of Alberta brain centre neurosciences intensive care unit, and \$81 million for the completion of the Gene Zwozdesky centre of Norwood. We have so much more.

Ms Sweet: Given the chronic underfunding of public health care by this government has meant more patients with less access to public health care and given that doctors are already leaving the province while 94 per cent of nurses are reporting burnout from overwork and given that my constituents are suffering for years while their surgeries get delayed again and again and given that land is ready for development at the Alberta hospital area in my riding in northeast Edmonton, can the minister commit today to building a new hospital in Edmonton-Manning? My constituents can't afford to wait any longer.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're going to continue to make sure we build facilities, and we are going to do it strategically. We've got \$2 million for in-patient towers at Grey Nuns and Misericordia community hospital. That's an additional 700 spaces. We've got \$11 million for the Stollery stand-alone hospital. We have \$3 million for planning the Strathcona community hospital expansion. Right here in Edmonton: \$15 million for planning the urgent care centres, including four urgent care centres in the Edmonton corridor; \$10 million – I could go on and on. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

2:40

Rental Housing

Mr. McDougall: Mr. Speaker, in 2023 the city of Calgary experienced a 14 per cent increase in rental prices. However, last year rental prices declined by 7.2 per cent, the fastest drop among major Canadian cities. This decline demonstrates the success of this government's approach to housing policy. Last year this government opposed rent control, a policy that would have discouraged investment and reduced housing supply, despite the opposition's calls for its implementation. To the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services: how has this government's approach to increase housing supply contributed to this decline in rental prices, and . . .

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

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right. The Official Opposition tried to bring in rent control inside our province, which other provinces have tried, and it resulted in devastating impacts on their housing market. This government focused on red tape, supporting our industry, and making sure we had policy that has now paid off. We've led the way in the country, housing starts up across the province by 32 per cent, and we're finally starting to see rent come down, as the member said, in Calgary by 7.2 per cent, the only example anywhere in this country right here in Alberta, because we did it our way. We focused on our industry, and we rejected the NDP's rent control plan.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that Calgary's vacancy rate has now risen to 4.8 per cent, providing renters with more options and stabilizing the market, and given that experts warn a slowdown in new construction could reverse these positive trends and further given that our government's pro-growth policies and focus on increasing housing supply have played a key role in reducing rental prices in the long run, can the same minister elaborate on the steps this government has taken to ensure continued growth in housing supply, maintain affordability, and ensure this positive trend is not reversed?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, just a wayback machine here inside the Legislature for some of the new members. They may not know that the Official Opposition NDP, when they were in government, kicked out a member named Robyn Luff for even bringing up having a conversation about rent control, and now, staggeringly, the Official Opposition has spent this entire time trying to advocate for rent control.

Mr. Speaker, we're going to continue to make sure to lead the way across the country. It's why underneath the NDP we saw wait-lists go up by 76 per cent when it came to affordable housing. Not here with this government. Our stock is up by 40 per cent. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek is the only one with the call.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for the response. Given that affordability remains a top concern for many Albertans – housing supply alone is not the only factor affecting rental prices – and given that long-term affordability also depends on other factors such as strong infrastructure, sustained economic growth, and effective collaboration with municipalities, can the same minister explain how this government is working with municipalities and industry partners to ensure sustainable, long-term affordability in Alberta's rental market?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, municipalities are key to the work that we've done in this province. We're proud to work with them to reduce red tape, focus on building more capacity inside the system, which creates more homes for people. It's that simple.

Unfortunately, the NDP wanted to continue with their encampment strategy, people living in encampments, the drug abuse that was taking place in encampments, Mr. Speaker. They devastated the largest capital city so much that the White House took notice, condemned what was taking place in this province, and they used it as part of the reason for bringing forward tariffs. But don't worry. We continue to make sure that capacity is built and to reject the ludicrous ideas of the NDP.

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)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has a statement to make.

Canadian Nationalism

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am Canadian. I am so proud to stand with my fellow Canadians as we work to uphold our

shared values of democracy, peace, human rights, diversity, and perhaps the most well-known value, never being afraid to say sorry. While we are quick to apologize, we're also quick to unite when times are tough, especially against a common threat. Albertan values are Canadian values.

As the shadow minister for Tourism and Sport I'm so proud to highlight the incredible achievement of Alberta athletes representing our nation on the global scale or players getting their first goal on wobbly skates. I'm so proud to highlight the beautiful landscapes and tourism attractions that bring so many tourists to Canada. As a proud granddaughter of a World War II veteran and as the military liaison I've had the unique privilege of working with and learning from the bravest Canadians, who work to defend our shared values every day. From championing human rights and peacekeeping to groundbreaking innovations and cultural achievements, there is so much to highlight in our beautiful country. Now more than ever it's important to celebrate and reinforce what it means to be a proud Canadian.

So many Canadians are stepping up to share their pride, supporting Canadian businesses and supporting one another in community. The Alberta New Democrats are proud to represent Albertans on Team Canada. Will this government unite with their fellow Canadians, stand up against Trump's tariffs, and join team Canada?

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill 44, the Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2025, sponsored by the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert has a tabling.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling five copies of a report written by Inclusion Alberta, January 2025, Current State: Critical & Urgent, Experiences with Persons with Developmental Disabilities (PDD).

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Edgemont.

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies from Phil Heidenreich's article, Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton Says Funding Cuts Forcing Pause on Intakes for Some Services. The pot of money in question is not the pot of money that was given to us in 2023.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite five copies of a document of e-mails from individuals, primarily from Calgary, who are disparaging the government's decision to not go with the city of Calgary's regional green line proposal and take a much more expensive line decision instead.

The Speaker: Edmonton-South.

Member Hoyle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings, five copies each. They're e-mails from constituents who are educational assistants in schools in Edmonton-South. One's talking about reminding this UCP government about the importance of EAs to children's learning and their success. The other one is an EA

expressing great frustration over the government not being able to come to an agreement for bargaining and offer a reasonable salary.

The Speaker: Calgary-Beddington.

Ms Chapman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a letter from an Alberta mom, Amanda. Great name. She is a single mom, education support worker. Without an increase in her wages her rent is now 89 per cent of her income. It's shameful.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday, followed by Whitemud.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I table the requisite copies of a joint press release with various First Nations, including Saddle Lake, Louis Bull, Samson, Montana, Ermineskin, Onion Lake, Kehewin, Beaver Lake, and Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation, which states inter alia that rights holders are not organizations and provincial treaty orgs do not speak on behalf of sovereign nations and gives notice to this government that they will not stand by for the erosion of their sovereignty, as well as requisite copies of a press release from the Mikisew Cree First Nation asserting that they do not tolerate and will not ever support Canada becoming the 51st state of the United States. Elbows up.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday moves in the direction of a member's statement when you add personal commentary like "elbows up." I would encourage him to stick to the tabling of documents.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a January 2025 report titled Too Little, Too Late from Inclusion Alberta, which is a survey to hear the experiences of a growing number of Alberta families who are waiting for supports under the family supports for children with disabilities program.

The Speaker: Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has a tabling.

Member Irwin: Thank you. I'm sharing an *Edmonton Journal* article by Mary Jane James. She's the CEO of the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton. She's urging the government to do the right thing and fund the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton. Survivors cannot wait; do the right thing.

2:50

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Ms Smith, Premier, President of Executive Council, and Minister of Intergovernmental Relations, pursuant to the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities Act the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities 2023-24 annual report.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I wish to advise the Assembly that there were no points of order today. A gold star for everyone.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

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

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I call the committee into order.

**Bill 206
Child and Youth Advocate (Parent and Guardian
Advisor) Amendment Act, 2024**

The Deputy Chair: On the floor is amendment A1. Do we have any wishing to speak to amendment A1? I will recognize the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Sorry. I need a bit of a clarification. Is this going from the time that I had allotted from the last time?

The Chair: You can speak for 10 minutes.

Mr. Cyr: Ten minutes? Thank you for the clarification, sir.

I'd like to finish off what I was saying earlier just to finish off my thoughts, and then I can go on to some of the other concerns that I've heard. I also believe that all parents and guardians in this Chamber should be able to see and understand the utility of having legislation like Bill 206 in this place. Moreover, I believe, along with many of my colleagues on this side of the Chamber, that parents and guardians are a child's primary caregiver and have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of their children as well. Full stop.

I thank all of those from the bottom of my heart who have provided support and feedback on this bill and the amendments to discuss constructive ways to make it better. I would also like to continue to offer any member on either side of the House the opportunity to meet with me in my office to discuss the feedback that you have and may have as well as ways that I could earn unanimous consent or unanimous support for this bill. In conclusion, I ask my colleagues in this Chamber to please consider voting for the amendments of my private member's Bill 206, the Child and Youth Advocate (Parent and Guardian Advisor) Amendment Act of 2024.

Now, that was my introduction to the amendment, and I'd like to discuss the bill itself here. I'd like to thank the individuals within the House, specifically those that have supported my bill because there was a lot of hard work that was put into this bill. What happens is that we moved through a lot of consultation. I met with the Child and Youth Advocate. I've met with some special interest groups. I've met with members of both sides of the House, and when it comes to moving forward a bill that is focused on getting information to parents, I have to say that when it comes to this House, you would hope that it would be unanimous. We would want all parents and their guardians to have all the information of the services and the ability to be able to represent themselves the best way possible when it comes to their children.

Now, for myself, I will say again that this is my second term. My first term was from 2015 to 2019 underneath the NDP government, as an opposition member with the Wildrose Party. Then it moved on to the UCP, and I was a UCP member. During that time that means that we had ministers of the NDP in place.

It's important to understand that parents have been asking for supports for a long time. This is not something that's new. Matter of fact, I've got an article here from the *Star*, which is not a right-leaning paper. It's actually a left-leaning paper. What I will say is that when it comes to the *Star*, there was an article they had put out on June 18, 2018, Alberta Parents Call for Better Access to Special-needs Services. Underneath the article the description is: "Angry parents protested outside the constituency office of NDP MLA" for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. Now, in this demonstration outside of an NDP former minister's constituency office, here's a quote: "Demonstrators rallied outside of two Alberta constituency offices

on Monday to protest what they described as the province's inability to provide meaningful supports for special-needs children."

Now, many of you know that for myself, I have something near and dear to my heart. I have two – not one but two – nephews that are autistic. For me, I've seen what both my sister and my brother have gone through trying to find the supports that they need. What happens is that they have no central point for them to be able to call and get information. We have no ability to be able to figure out what parents truly want. This is important because what happens is that the first term of the NDP, they had no solution. Why I say that is something that had come forward here, that they were citing that they had difficulties getting inside of this. I'm going to quote the article again: "They also cited difficulty getting regular access to the very specialists — psychologists, psychiatrists, occupational therapists, among others."

Well, okay. What were the barriers that they were having? How did they have the ability to be able to talk this through to somebody, to be able to maybe have those conversations so they could be successful? You know what happened? Well, I will tell you. The MLA, a former minister, for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, "who also serves as Alberta's minister of community and social services, said the government has been gathering input from concerned parents since May and intends to release a 'What We Heard' report from a series of meetings with parents within the week." What we're looking at here is that the MLAs put out a report. This seems to be something that the NDP do regularly. They study it, but they actually don't do anything. This is a common thread.

Today, when it comes to my bill, I at least have the willingness to move something forward to help parents. So far we have heard from the NDP that they're unwilling to support my bill. They're not happy with the way that I am approaching this, and the direction that they would rather see is scrap the bill. Let's give the parents no ability to have access to information for their children.

You know, that's a common theme when it comes to the NDP. When it comes down to parental rights, it always is behind their, I guess, ideology, where government is always over top and they know better to best suit those children. I'm going to tell you that when it comes to the approach that I am taking, I believe that parents are the best. They are truly the best advocates for their children. When we do not give them the tools they need, it comes down to harming that child. So what do we hear from the NDP? It's that they're unhappy with how this is being rolled out. You know what? I'm looking forward to hearing what the NDP have to say on what they see as the next step. I would hope that everybody wants parents to succeed when it comes to their children, but outright just saying, "You know what? This doesn't work for us," without an alternative seems to be what is always their mantra, if you will.

3:00

Now, one of the things is that he's prepared a statement in this article. "We will ensure better access to direct services for children and we will continue to work with families and advocates on all issues that matter to them." You know what? They were thrown out of government because they didn't listen to anybody. This article is another example of the NDP unwillingness to actually listen to the grassroots, the real people, the common people that just want government out of their lives. They want to raise their families the way they have been raised. They just need some navigating skills to be able to get through government once in a while.

But that's not what the NDP do. They want to step into your life. They want to tell you or dictate to you how you should work and how you should raise your children. We heard that over and over.

The divisiveness of the NDP is a common thread when it comes to their ideology.

Now, a quote from the one of the parents: “We want to be involved with the care of our children. We want to learn the strategies. But there are methodologies of established rehabilitative practices that will take you there.” This is Maria Castro. You know what? Parents just want input. I want them to have input, and I would hope the NDP in all of this would also support my bill. When it comes down to it, no solution is ever a perfect solution, but what we can say is that something is better than nothing, which is what the NDP is proposing when they don’t support this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: I will recognize the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, followed by the Member for Camrose.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Given that we are still on the amendment and not the main bill, I will speak to the amendment and save my remarks on the main bill for afterwards. What I will say to the amendment: it is an amendment of no consequence. It changes a single word, which does not change any of the impact of the bill. It does not change any of the focus of the bill, the intent of the bill, or any of the harm the bill would cause. Therefore, I and, I believe, most of my colleagues on this side of the aisle will not be supporting this amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Camrose is next.

Ms Lovely: Thank you so much. I am pleased to rise today and support the amendment of Bill 206, Child and Youth Advocate (Parent and Guardian Advisor) Amendment Act, 2024, which proposes changing from the current title of “Parent and Guardian Advisor” to “Parent and Guardian Liaison.”

At the heart of our province lies the family, the cornerstone upon which the well-being of our children and the future of Alberta is built as a government. It is our responsibility to ensure that families have the support and resources that they need to thrive in environments where children can flourish and grow. The strength of a family is not only measured by its ability to support its members but also by the collective support it receives from the community and the systems designed to aid them.

This amendment does just that, Mr. Chair. It takes a meaningful step towards strengthening the systems that assist those who are fundamental to our communities, the children and families of Alberta. Families are the first teachers, caregivers, and supporters of children, but as the saying goes, it takes a village to raise a child. Raising children is a shared responsibility, one that requires a strong network of support from all corners of society: our schools, health care systems, and government services.

This simple shift in terminology may seem small, but in my view it’s a vital step towards improving both the clarity and effectiveness of this bill as it moves forward. At its core this amendment is about refining the function of the role to better reflect its intended purpose, emphasizing the liaison’s role as a bridge between families and government services rather than as an adviser, offering direct advice and facilitating communication and connection between families and services that exist to support them.

Adopting the term “liaison” makes it clear that this role is intended to be a bridge connecting families to the resources and support systems that they need, not a figure offering professional recommendations. Focusing on this shift in terminology emphasizes the neutral, facilitative nature of the role. This is not a position designed to advocate for one side or the other but, rather, a role that ensures families have the proper tools and access to

navigate complex government systems. The liaison function is to foster understanding and ensure communication flows smoothly and connect people to the services that will best assist them. In doing so, we are helping to remove the barriers that many families face when trying to access government supports.

I’d like to highlight how this change improves accessibility and understanding for the very families we aim to support. The term “adviser” can sometimes be ambiguous or even intimidating for families. When navigating complicated systems, the last thing that someone needs is the confusion of whether that role supports legal matters, professional guidance, or general support. On the other hand, the term “liaison” is universally understood as someone whose role is to assist with navigation systems, not to provide professional counsel. This makes the position more approachable and ultimately more effective in serving the families who need it most.

When we think of families, we’re reminded that they are not isolated units; they are interconnected with their communities, their schools, their health care systems, and their government services. Each family’s journey is unique, and no single system can meet all of their needs. The liaison role as outlined in this amendment acknowledges this reality through offering a clear and supportive point of contact for families as they navigate these often complex systems. As we modernize, so too must our legislation. This update in terminology would avoid any potential confusion about the role’s purpose and responsibilities. It aligns all sections of the bill with the updated title, ensuring that the language used is precise and transparent. This consistency will strengthen public trust and foster a clear understanding of the role for everyone involved, and it reinforces our commitment to make sure that our legislation works effectively for those it is designed to support.

In closing, I want to emphasize that these amendments do not alter the fundamental intent of Bill 206. The objective is still to support families in their vital role as primary caregivers and promote the well-being of Alberta’s children. What these amendments do is enhance the practicality and clarity of this legislation, ensuring that the liaison role is focused, effective, and fit for purpose. I wholeheartedly support the passing of this amendment, and I urge my fellow members to consider the profound positive impact that it will have on our communities.

Our children are not just the future of Alberta; they are the foundation upon which we build our prosperous and compassionate society. Supporting families in the roles as caregivers means supporting the well-being of our youngest citizens. It means ensuring that they have the opportunity to succeed and contribute to the growth of our province. It means strengthening not only our families but the very fabric of our communities with determination and with a shared purpose. This will aid in building a stronger Alberta for generations to come.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any others wishing to comment? The Member for Grande Prairie has risen.

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate being able to stand before you, express my support for the Child and Youth Advocate (Parent and Guardian Advisor) Amendment Act, 2024. I am in favour of these thoughtful amendments that we have been presented with here today.

We are very supportive on this side of our future of Alberta, which is kids. The next generation is extremely important and, as I said, the cornerstone of the future of Alberta. This bill is a fantastic bill, to be able to support families as they raise up their kids. Mr. Chair, this government: we’ve consistently prioritized the health,

the safety, and the stability of our families. As a family guy with three kids, three wonderful kids, Creed, Jayce, and Nash, I just understand that the very cornerstone of our society is made up with the future hope of our kids.

3:10

With this introduction of Bill 206 we do take another step forward in confirming that our children and families receive the support they need at a time when guidance and resources are very critical. This is an important bill. I do believe that at the very heart of this bill is a very powerful and critical role, the parent and guardian adviser. However, as we explored deeper into the conversation, there was a need for a little bit of a shift in this. It became pretty apparent that the name “advisor” wasn’t quite encapsulating the breadth and scope of the role that we thought it should be and that the role of this individual just has significant play for parents, guardians, and families.

This is where our amendment comes into play. We’re proposing to change the title of this position from “Parent and Guardian Advisor” to “Parent and Guardian Liaison.” While this is a small change, it does offer significance to this. It’s a change rooted to bring clarity, a change rooted in purpose, the core role that this individual in this role will serve. The term “liaison” really does better reflect what this role is, not just as a mere adviser for parents but a liaison, a connector, an opportunity for this individual to be a bridge into government services and also, hopefully, a trusted representative between families and the services that are available through the government.

The parent and guardian liaison will be instrumental in ensuring that the voices of parents and guardians are not just heard, but they’re amplified, creating a clearer and more streamlined path to navigate the complex landscape of services related to children’s education, adoption, custody issues, and more, Mr. Chair. It’s the liaison’s job to really help navigate these, understand the different programs and where an individual family or a child would fit into this. Oftentimes these are vulnerable situations that families find themselves in, and they need somebody to trust and be able to turn to to give them the proper guidance, to be that liaison, and also the critical resources and support systems that make a difference in a child’s life during those periods.

By modifying the title and modifying the amendment we’re discussing today, we’re also clarifying the duties that this individual does have as well. Now, one of the key aspects of the liaison position is not just to serve as a point of contact. Part of their job will be an advocate for these people, too, also working to identify where in the system are systematic barriers that may prevent families from fully accessing the services and opportunities available to them. Their job is also to identify gaps, report on those gaps, and ensure that we are always improving and evolving our approach to supporting our children and families. This is what this is about, Mr. Chair, making sure that our families and children have the supports needed by them as Albertans.

This amendment also aligns with the objective of Bill 206, which is to create a systemized system where somebody can turn for parents and guardians, providing them with the access and a united voice to matters that really affect their families. This is a good opportunity for our government to stand with families. As it stands, Mr. Chair, many families across the province often find the number of services we offer almost overwhelming. There’s often almost a maze that they have to go through in order to find the different services. There are different aspects of their child’s well-being that they would need to encapsulate and be able to pursue. Whether it’s education, child intervention, or health services, there are a lot of complexities to the system, and that can be overwhelming,

especially for families that are under duress. The role of the liaison will be able to simplify this process, offering guidance, support, and above all the critical referrals to the right resources at the right time.

Going back to the amendment here, Mr. Chair, this is a critical part of Bill 206. By amending the position’s name to “liaison,” we’re ensuring that the role is one that encourages active engagement and personal connections with families. The liaison won’t just be a figurehead placed there, but they will be a complete part of the support system that empowers parents and guardians to make the best decisions for their children. This is what our government is about, making sure that parents and guardians have the say to be able to make the very best choices for their kids and those they’re guarding over.

With this change, Mr. Chair, we just affirm the importance of this individual’s duties. We recognize that the liaison will be playing a key role in our province’s ability to identify some opportunities and issues and also, hopefully, deliver solutions in order to provide a lasting impact for both them and the well-being of our children and the future generations across Alberta.

Now, our government, Mr. Chair, is not just responsive, as this position might imply, but it’s proactive in its commitment to solving the challenges that parents face. Let’s also consider the broader scope of Bill 206. This bill seeks to address some of the most sensitive, important issues within Alberta: child intervention, family stability, and access to resources. By creating this new office of the liaison, we are ensuring that every family has access to a trusted professional who is dedicated to advocating on their behalf. Whether it’s helping a family navigate the education system or providing key mental health resources, the parent and guardian liaison will be there every step of the way for them.

The liaison’s role will also bring a much-needed sense of clarity to the responsibilities of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate, the OCYA. Parents and guardians will no longer just need to navigate a patchwork system to address their concerns. Instead, they’ll have this dedicated source of contact in the liaison, someone who will not only provide guidance but also direct them to the appropriate services and organizations that will help them along.

I just want to take a moment to just make sure that everyone understands why this is so important. Families are the foundation of our society. Quality parents are – we’ve seen this in Alberta. People come to Alberta because of the Alberta advantage. They come to Alberta because they see hope for their children. They come to Alberta because they’re willing to put in the time, put in the work, build up a great society, and be able to say: I see a future not just for me, but I see it for my children and my grandchildren and potentially great-grandchildren. By strengthening families, we give the opportunity for this to continue as well. We’re strengthening the future of Alberta through this.

Bill 206 along with the amendments we are debating today will make an enormous difference in how parents and guardians interact with our systems in government. Most importantly, it will have a very big impact on the well-being of the children they care for. It’s clear that we as a government are deeply committed to supporting families across Alberta, and today’s amendments reflect that commitment. By creating the role of the parent and guardian liaison, we are improving access, improving outcomes, and ultimately improving the lives of children in Alberta.

I’m proud to stand behind this amendment and Bill 206 as a whole. We’re sending the strong message here today that we value parents, that we value guardians, that we support them in their critical role in a child’s life, and that we will continue to invest to support their needs.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I urge all of you to support this important amendment and the bill as a whole. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any others?

The Member for Edmonton-City Centre, amendment A1.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. It seems the government members are interested in staying on debate in the amendment. If that's the case, I'm happy to speak, then, to the amendment. Speaking of the amendment, which, again, changes a single word – it changes the word “advocate” to “liaison” – it is wholly inadequate to address the deep problems with this act. Let me speak a bit to why changing “advocate” to “liaison” doesn't come anywhere close to addressing the problems with this piece of legislation.

Now, the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul in speaking to the amendment spoke quite a bit to the bill, and in so doing, he talked quite a bit about his concerns about the record of the NDP government, which was out of power, Mr. Chair, since 2019. We've had a UCP government for going on six years. Six years. So if that member is concerned that six years after his party formed government, they have failed to step up to provide the services and supports that parents need, the solution is not a private member's bill imposing on the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. The solution is for that member to advocate to their ministers to step up and do their job.

Frankly, what the member is confessing or what he is essentially admitting here is that he feels he has no hope of convincing his own government ministers to actually step up through the programs and supports that already exist in ministries like Seniors, Community and Social Services, that he has no hope of convincing them to provide better supports to parents, which is what he said is needed. He said that parents have been desperately looking for help, that they don't know where to find it and they're unable to find it. Then he should speak to that minister about improving that system, improving those programs.

I can tell you, Mr. Chair, that I have not spoken to one single parent who has a child with special needs or a disability who has said to me: boy, things are better since the UCP came in. I have had an awful lot come to me and say how things have gotten much worse.

3:20

What the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul is telling us is either that he feels he has no chance of convincing their ministers to step up to actually address what parents are asking for or parents need – indeed, he's said that this individual, this liaison or advocate, needs to go out and find out what the barriers are. He doesn't even trust his own ministers to actually go out and listen to Albertans. Either that, or he is saying that he himself is an ineffective advocate in being able to speak to those ministers and being able to speak up for those parents, as are all of his colleagues who have been in these seats for at least part of the last six years.

To be absolutely clear, Mr. Chair, it doesn't matter whether you call them a liaison or an advocate. They don't belong in the Child and Youth Advocate's office. It is the job of the government to be ensuring that Albertans are able to access the programs that the government operates. It is the job of the government and the ministers to ensure that those programs are adequate and are meeting the needs of Albertans. It is the job of the government to go out and conduct the actual conversations with Albertans to find out where the barriers and the problems are.

What this member is telling us is that this government for six years has failed. That is not the fault of the Child and Youth

Advocate, whose budget this government capped, who this government told: sorry; you don't need as much as you're asking for. But now this member wants to turn and take a portion of that Child and Youth Advocate's budget for his pet project.

Now, to be clear, Mr. Chair, I absolutely, one hundred per cent agree. We should be supporting families. We should be supporting parents. We should be doing everything possible to make sure they can access the services they need. This member says: well, what does the NDP propose, then? What is the next step? I will tell that member. The next step is for this government's ministers to step up and do their job, which is what we have been advocating for for the last six years.

If we need to be addressing services that are available for parents who have children with autism, then by all means, let's do so. Let's have that conversation with the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services, like our shadow minister, the Member for St. Albert, has been trying to do for six years, raising again the question of wait times for them to be able to access services, the wait-lists, the barriers that exist.

I just spoke about a month and a half ago with the mother of an autistic child, the wife of a friend of mine, who was rejected in trying to get services for her son. She went through multiple rounds and appeals and was turned down repeatedly by the rules that have been set forward by this government. If the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul wants to make things better, he can talk to that minister about removing those barriers and improving the system. If that, in fact, is his intent, that is the effective way to do this.

It is not that we are saying, Mr. Chair, in any way that there is nothing that could be done or that we want nothing to be done. We're saying: use the systems the way they exist, the way they are meant to be used, the way they would be used under an ethical, competent government. But it's clear right now that we have neither.

Let me talk a bit more about why changing “advocate” to “liaison” does not address the fundamental flaws in this bill. Again, Mr. Chair, we do not disagree with the idea that parents deserve support. They deserve guidance. They deserve navigation. They deserve actual services and supports to be able to help their children. We do not disagree on that. But the fact is that the Child and Youth Advocate is an independent officer of the Legislature.

Now, Mr. Chair, I've had the honour of sitting on the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices since I was first elected in 2015. I've had a chance to get to know our independent legislative officers very well: their mandate, the way they function. Independent officers of the Legislature are a special breed. They are unique. That is why we have such a limited number. They are independent of the Legislature while reporting to the Legislature. They have strict and specific duties to represent on behalf of Albertans outside of political interference. Their independence is sacrosanct in their ability to do that.

Now, what this member is proposing to do is have a committee dominated by a majority of government members choose an individual to be placed inside that independent legislative officer's office over which they will have no control, whom they have to provide a salary and budget out of their own resources, and who is working on an initiative, a function that is entirely outside the mandate of the legislation under which they function, the Child and Youth Advocate Act.

It's unprecedented, Mr. Chair. It has never been done in Alberta to the best of my knowledge, never been done in any province in Canada. It is akin to saying: we're going to take the Auditor General's office, and we're going to put somebody in there that we will assign by MLAs to help Albertans do their taxes. Now, that sounds a bit frivolous and lighthearted, and that is not in any way

meant to dismiss the very real concerns that parents have around access to services. It is to highlight how inappropriate and improper such a move is.

What this member is proposing to do is to end the independence of the Child and Youth Advocate by prescribing how they spend their resources. Again, this member could go talk to any minister of his government. He could talk to the Minister of Children and Family Services, he could talk to the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services and ask them to use their budgets, their resources to do what they should be doing anyways. Instead, he's going to the Child and Youth Advocate, an independent officer that is there to advocate for children who in many cases do not have parental support, some of the most vulnerable children in our province, children who have some of the highest rates of death, of suicide in our province. He wants to take a portion of their budget to do the job that his ministers and his government have not been doing and are refusing to do.

That is why simply changing the word "advocate" to "liaison," Mr. Chair, does not address the issue. If this member believes there should be a liaison, then let the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services stand up and appoint one, create one in his office, and pay for it. That is where it belongs. That is where that work should happen.

Mr. Chair, has that been 20 minutes? [Mr. Shepherd's speaking time expired] Okay. All right.

The Deputy Chair: Ten.

Any others wishing to speak? The Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mrs. Johnson: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul for his hard work on Bill 206. Like many of us on this side of the Chamber, this member clearly understands the fundamental importance of family. Bill 206 speaks to something that every single one of us in this room understands, family.

Family represents the foundation upon which strong communities and strong provinces stand. Families teach us right from wrong and the value of hard work. Good families shape us into responsible, contributing members of our communities. Our government firmly believes in the sanctity of the role of the family. We believe that our province is only as strong as the families within Alberta. Any responsible government will stand up for families to ensure that they have the tools and the support they need to succeed.

Mr. Chair, raising kids today presents unique, modern challenges. Families face enormous pressure. Today economic uncertainties stem from a federal government that does not have the best interests of Albertans in mind. If passed, Bill 206 will establish a framework which respects parental rights while ensuring families have access to the tools, the information, and the resources that they need through a dedicated liaison. We recognize that the strength of our province stems from the strength of our families. Our government has the duty to support those who dedicate their lives to raising the next generation of Albertans.

You see, Mr. Chair, I grew up in a community where your neighbours weren't just people who lived next door; they were the ones who had your back. Your morning coffee came from a mom-and-pop shop that knew your order before you walked in the door. The books you borrowed came from the local library, where the librarian knew your name. The food on your table came from farmers who took pride in feeding Alberta families. And when a family faced hardship, the community stepped up without hesitation and without question.

3:30

I recently heard, Mr. Chair, a story from one of our staffers here in the Legislature. When he was a child, his father suffered a serious illness, leaving the family in a very difficult position. His mother, trying to balance work, caregiving, and raising the kids, was overwhelmed. But in true Alberta fashion the community rallied around them. Neighbours babysat. Families dropped off hot meals. Others helped with school drop-offs and pickups. The result? Those children didn't grow up remembering the hardship; they remembered the love, the support, and the sense of community that carried them through.

That, Mr. Chair, is the Alberta way. It's about showing up for one another. It's about making sure parents never feel like they're doing it alone. It's about reinforcing the support systems that make our community strong. This bill ensures that support is always available to families that need it. Let me be absolutely clear: this is not about government stepping in and telling parents how to raise their kids. Far from it. This bill is about making sure parents have access to the support they need when they need it.

On this side of the Chamber we don't believe in government overreach. We don't believe in policies that undermine the role of parents. We do believe in common-sense solutions. We do believe in a government that listens to families, respects their choices, and helps them succeed not by dictating but by supporting. This bill is about ensuring that no parent in Alberta feels alone, that they have somewhere to turn when they need guidance, that when they face challenges, they have resources to rely on, and that the values that built this province – strong families, strong communities, and a belief in personal responsibility – continue to guide us forward.

The liaison established through this bill will be a critical resource offering advice, support, and advocacy for parents who need it most. We understand that parenting does not come with a manual. Every family is different, and every child is different. That's why this bill is designed to be flexible, so that parents can get the support they need tailored to their individual circumstances. Whether it's navigating the school system, academic services, spiritual support, mental and physical supports, or finding community resources, the liaison will be there to provide professional, practical, and effective guidance.

Mr. Chair, we've seen what happens when government ignores families. We have seen policies from other jurisdictions that diminish the role of parents, that push them to the sidelines of their children's lives, and that will not happen here. Not in Alberta. Not on our watch. This bill is about standing up and saying loud and clear that parents matter, family matters. Our communities are strongest when we empower those at the heart of them: mothers, fathers, grandparents, caregivers, and everyone who plays a role in raising our future generations.

Mr. Chair, I urge all members of this Assembly to support this bill. Stand with Alberta families, recognize that strong families make a strong province, and understand that by supporting parents, we are investing in the future of Alberta. Let's work together to ensure no family ever feels alone in raising their children, and let's send a clear message that in Alberta family always comes first.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Speakers for amendment A1? We are on amendment A1. The Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Thanks, Mr. Chair. On the amendment for this. I want to thank the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul for his hard work on Bill 206, firstly. It's clear to me that he's very much a family man, very much has been listening to his constituents. Similar to the members opposite as well, we believe in, you know,

the fundamental importance of family here in the Chamber, all of us.

The purpose of the bill is to create a system of supports through a parent liaison, and the duties of that liaison: provide information, assistance, and referrals to improve children's well-being; assist families with school education programs for the purpose of promoting academic success and well-being; identify systemic barriers in government programs and services that may negatively impact families and children's well-being. So supporting children and families is really what the intent is here, Mr. Chair.

Our government is committed to ensuring the well-being of children in our province, and parents and guardians are the primary caregivers for those children. According to article 18 of the UN convention on the rights of the child "parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians, have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and [health] of the child." Families are a fundamental building block of social society, and our UCP government values strong family units and the essential role that they play in society. We're committed to ensure that families are supported in nurturing and guiding and fostering the growth and well-being of their children. This bill aims to ensure that parents and guardians have improved access to all the resources and information available to them.

Currently there's no centralized advocacy group, which could be confusing. It could provide a few hurdles for parents already dealing with difficult times. The intent that I've heard from the member and others here, for that clarification, is to try to streamline that process a bit and help navigate and act as liaison for those functions.

Again, the purpose of the bill is creating a parent and guardian liaison with Alberta's office of the Child and Youth Advocate. The Child and Youth Advocate "must, on the recommendation of the Standing Committee, designate [a liaison] to carry out the duties and functions set out in this Act." The liaison will be important in providing parents with a voice in regard to issues like education, adoption, custody issues and allow our government to demonstrate that they support parents in achieving what is best for their children.

The bill amends the Child and Youth Advocate Act, which addresses very sensitive issues, obviously, including children receiving child intervention services as well as children who may have in the past received intervention services. Centralized organization to deal with all of these issues for parent or guardian advocacy would be convenient to refer parents to the proper outlet to handle their concerns and compile the information of systemic issues concerning the parents.

The liaison must annually prepare a report on the exercise of the liaison's duties and under the act provide the report to the Child and Youth Advocate. This report will include a summary of the liaison's activities as well as other statistical information and details and any systemic barriers as identified by the adviser in respect to government programs and services negatively impacting families and the well-being of children.

The reference to anecdotes, supporting family, and to your own story about the importance of support: these items have come across a number of our desks, Mr. Chair. It's a pretty big, complex system that's been built up over the years with the best of intent, and unfortunately when folks get into that big system, it's not as easy for them from the outside as it is when you're on the inside. I believe the intent that I've heard here today and with this amendment is to make sure that there are resources to help people navigate through that very big and well-intended system.

The government is dedicated to the well-being of children in our province, and parents and guardians as primary caregivers play a crucial role in children's development. As stated in article 18 of the

convention on the rights of the child, parents and legal guardians have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of their children. Strong families are the foundation of a healthy society, and our government values and will support them in this essential role. We're committed to providing families with the support they need to nurture, guide, and foster the well-being of children. The bill strengthens the resources and information, ensuring parents and guardians receive the assistance they need.

Again, I appreciate all the members here for standing up and talking about this. I appreciate them bringing their insight from across the aisle as well. Again, it's with the best intent. I believe this amendment makes the bill stronger and allows for, hopefully, all in the Chamber here today to support it.

With that, thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: On amendment A1 the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is my pleasure to rise and speak to the proposed amendment to Bill 206, the Child and Youth Advocate (Parent and Guardian Advisor) Amendment Act, 2024. The amendment was put forward by my colleague the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul, who also happens to be the sponsor of the bill itself.

This amendment aims to address a couple of issues that were identified since Bill 206 was tabled last March. The proposed amendment would be quick and an effective solution to the challenges parents are facing when it comes to navigating government bureaucracy. The amendment changes the language of the bill, changing "advisor" to "liaison," itself reflecting some of the careful consideration this legislation has gone through. The word "liaison" more accurately reflects the goal of this bill, which is to create a role that can bridge the gap between families and government services.

Families are of central importance to this government and to this province and to our way of life. On this side of the House we cherish the role parents play in their children's lives, and we want to support parents in all that they do. Bill 206 aims to ensure that parents and guardians have a knowledgeable, supportive, and independent liaison to help guide them on their rights and connect them to important resources.

3:40

The point that is central to why the amended language is key is because this liaison will be a neutral connector rather than an advocate or someone in position to provide any kind of legal counsel.

If passed, Bill 206 mandates the liaison to prepare a comprehensive annual report on their activities and highlight any systemic barriers identified in public programs and services affecting families' and children's well-being. This accountability mechanism, Mr. Chair, would ensure transparency and encourage ongoing improvements and support services. This liaison would be able to help support parents with a variety of issues. This includes issues around education, adoption, custody disputes, and so much more.

Mr. Chair, being a parent is hard enough. Parents love their kids more than anyone else in this world, but sometimes they face unique challenges and they don't know where to turn. Here we can also see the value of the amended language. "Liaison" is a term that is simpler and more familiar, so families should not be daunted in taking advantage of this role to help them navigate what are often complex government systems. Simply put, we want this position to be approachable and accessible. This person will be a true

navigator, someone to help guide them through that government bureaucracy that, quite honestly, we also often complain about when we're members of the public.

Mr. Stephan: It's very bad, very bad sometimes.

Mr. Yao: Agreed.

Our government is firmly committed to supporting the well-being of children and families, and Bill 206 is a great way to build on that progress. Currently, Mr. Chair, Alberta does not have any kind of liaison for parents. This can sometimes create confusion and obstacles for parents who are just looking for support. If the amendment and bill are to pass, it would establish a single point of contact for parent and guardian advocacy. This in turn would streamline access to assistance and ensure that Albertans are being directed to the appropriate resources to address their concerns.

On this side of the House we have long stood by parents and the rights of parents to raise their children. We certainly do not want to put up roadblocks or barriers to parents and guardians who simply want the support to do their job well in raising the next generation. Parents and legal guardians have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of their children.

Mr. Chair, this amendment and bill are a way to make the very busy lives of parents and guardians just a little bit easier. By centralizing that point of contact, Albertans will be able to access assistance in a more streamlined manner, in a way that this navigator can help them understand that bureaucracy that is very intimidating and help be that shining light as they work through that process. This will support them in raising the next generation of Albertan doctors, teachers, first responders, trade workers, farmers, and so much more. The solution offered by this amendment represents a step towards making it easier for families to find the support that they need.

As mentioned in Bill 206, the stability of families is a critical component of a healthy society. On this side of the House we do stand with families. We want to support them to succeed because successful families make for a successful Alberta. A successful Alberta is what this government was elected to make happen. Mr. Chair, passing this amendment and bill will add to the series of measures aimed at improving Alberta.

I recognize that I don't have unlimited time, so I'll start to wrap up my remarks here. Bill 206, Mr. Chair, the Child and Youth Advocate Act, also known as the parent and guardian liaison amendment act, is an important bill for Albertan families. If passed, 206 will create a parent and guardian liaison role within Alberta's office of the Child and Youth Advocate to support parents and connect them with those important resources. This role will have three clear purposes. One is to support families in nurturing, guiding, and fostering the growth and well-being of children; two, to support the stability of families as critical components of a healthy society; and, three, Mr. Chair, to carry out their duties in a manner that ensures the best interests, the safety, and well-being of children and that that safety is paramount. I strongly endorse this parent and guardian liaison role, and because of that I also endorse Bill 206, the Child and Youth Advocate amendment act. I encourage all members of this Assembly to vote in favour of Bill 206.

With that, I will stand down. I thank you for this opportunity to speak in this great and magnificent House, this place of freedom and democracy in Alberta here. Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. I greatly appreciate this opportunity.

The Deputy Chair: The Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul has risen to speak to the amendment.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I'd like to thank my colleagues that have spoken on this amendment. I would like to discuss some of the comments made by the Member for Edmonton-City Centre. You know, when it comes to an important bill like Bill 206, I recognize that when it comes to the opposition, really, their responsibility is to strengthen bills, to see how it is that as a bill goes through the House – not to just be there to be complainers or objectors. A lot of times it's: can we strengthen it? I've heard none of that. As a matter of fact, I heard no solutions come from the Member for Edmonton-City Centre. When it comes down to it, he's saying . . .

Mr. Shepherd: Do your job.

Mr. Cyr: He just said, "Do your job." I am doing my job, sir. I am.

You know what I will say? He made a compelling case why private member bills should not exist. I disagree. My God. He was actually saying that a private member bill should not be something that is used by the government members, and I'm assuming that means by opposition members as well. You know what? It is sad to hear as a private member an opposition member actually making the case that we shouldn't bring forward ideas as a member. I would say that it's problematic that we wouldn't have this ability to have private members.

You know what I will say? It goes even further. He actually compares parents with filing tax returns, a mechanism with government to take our money is essentially what I'm trying to say: let's prevent. What he says is that it's inappropriate for it to be in the Child and Youth Advocate's office. Okay. You know what? I would love to hear what his thoughts are behind that. But he goes further. He goes further in saying that this is essentially like bringing forward the Auditor General and filing tax returns within the Auditor General's office. There is no comparison. It's absurd. That whole premise is absurd.

Everything that he said was absurd because in the end he isn't doing his job as opposition to try to strengthen the bill. All he's saying is: "You know what? When it comes to your ministers, they're not doing their job." My ministers: I'm very proud of them. They're all doing their job. These are good men and women that are out there doing their jobs for us, and I will tell you that I actually sat with the relevant ministers when it comes to my bill to strengthen this legislation, and they put their part in. The idea comes from a backbench MLA, and it's for me as a member to run that forward.

3:50

You know what? Sometimes the Legislature doesn't feel as if they can support your bill. What I will say is that, well, maybe I need to take that back. Sometimes maybe it's not even a good idea. But what I can say is that when it comes down to it, saying that this has not been a long-standing issue all the way back to the NDP time reflects poorly on my ministers: that's just wrong.

When it comes to the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, I will tell you that we saw success during my first term. I'm going to use my first term with Bill 202, Protecting Victims of Non-Consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act. That is a bill that I proudly put through this House in my first term. That bill was me working with the former Minister of Justice and former Minister of Education. Not once did I say to those NDP ministers: you are not doing your job because you didn't come up with this idea. Not once. I said: "Thank you for working with me. Thank you for passing my bill."

Ms Hoffman: You're welcome.

Mr. Cyr: You know what? The former NDP Minister of Health agrees with me. We worked well together. That's the whole thing when it comes to these private member bills. When we come to the understanding that it is an important function, private members' bills, and the fact that our governments sometimes need these private members' input – they do need these private members' input to be able to put forward strong legislation.

Now, I can say that when my first bill went through, it was a challenge. Opposition doesn't necessarily get bills through the House. I was the 16th Albertan to ever put through an opposition bill in this House, and I'm thankful to the NDP. I'm also thankful for – at that time they strengthened my bill. They worked with me to strengthen that bill. And you know what? To this day I am thankful to the NDP for hearing my vision, helping me influence it, and passing it unanimously through the House. That is how you successfully move forward legislation, not criticizing, the way that Edmonton-City Centre has done.

I'm going to tell you that when it comes down to it, what he did was just said that private member bills shouldn't exist. You know what? Those protections for women and young girls today wouldn't exist had I not been able to work with the opposition, the government at the time. But when it comes to our government right now, they would rather polarize it. He actually was saying that by opening up the scope of the Child and Youth Advocate to allow for them to help parents out, we were effectively going to be killing children. It's that kind of polarization that is completely out of order. I'm going to tell you that when it comes to the NDP, you can see that they continue to ramp this up to precarious spaces that we cannot accept in this House. Having a debate and saying, "Let's open up these discussions" without going to "You're harming another person irreparably" – that seems to be the only answer that the NDP have. That's the only defence. No solutions. No ideas for improvement. Just: let's go out and criticize it and make some clicks.

Mr. Stephan: Fearmongering.

Mr. Cyr: Fearmongering. Thank you.

I am hopeful that they come forward and they actually support my bill. This is a good bill. You know what? When it comes to ensuring that parents in Alberta have the tools they need, I would hope that every Albertan would be behind us in that. Now, when it comes to this amendment, I recognize the fact that they're potentially against liaison or adviser. That's a strange argument they're making on this one. But what I can say is that for me, I put my heart into this, and I would hope that my colleagues across the aisle, when they're putting forward a private member's bill, they're putting their heart and soul into these bills. It's unfortunate to hear that you don't have all-party support on something. When it comes down to our government, it is something that we've become used to.

What I can tell you is that in our time, the Wildrose, when I first started out and then ended my term with the UCP, we were there to help the government. We were always there looking to find solutions to the problems that were put forward. A lot of times, when it comes down to it, those solutions were shot down. We're not hearing any of those solutions now. All we hear is partisan rhetoric. That's all I get from the NDP these days. It's shameful of an opposition to be acting in this way. They can disagree with the approach, but come up with solutions on making it better. Instead, it has to always come down to that we're harming children.

I'll tell you: I take that to heart because I am not out to hurt a single child. That is terrible for them to even remotely assume onto this legislation. I'm going to tell you, Mr. Chair, that I look forward to hearing the rest of this debate. I'm hoping that it's more civil than

what the other MLA from across the aisle is because clearly, when it comes down to it, all he has in his mind is out to more or less cause an issue.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Shepherd: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: A point of order has been called. The Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Shepherd: Under 23(h), (i), and (j) and avowing motives of another member, saying that "all another member has on their mind is" is very clearly imputing motives. I would ask that the member apologize and withdraw that particular statement.

The Deputy Chair: The chief government whip.

Mr. Getson: I appreciate that, Mr. Chair. To the member opposite: obviously this is a very heated item. There were some things said earlier about intent, and when it comes to children I think you can see that everyone is very passionate about doing the right thing. But I do disagree. I don't think this is a point of order in all fairness. I think it's a matter of debate. I do believe that there is lots of boisterous content here and, again, children are a sensitive topic. So I'd leave it to the chair's discretion on this one, obviously, but I don't believe it's a point of order at this time.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Any others wishing to speak to the point of order?

I will not rule this as a point of order. I do believe that the member has put forward his debate and his arguments in a very passionate way. But I would provide caution to everybody that we are here to try and build good legislation for the province of Alberta and we do that in a respectful manner so that as we move forward, we continue to debate in a respectful manner and we will make good legislation for the citizens of Alberta.

Debate Continued

The Deputy Chair: Are there any others wishing to speak to the amendment, amendment A1?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on amendment A1 as proposed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: We are back on the main bill as amended. The Member for Edmonton-City Centre has risen to speak.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul, his passionate debate. You know, we are speaking about private members' bills and this particular private member's bill. I will be honest that the member maintains that I did not put forward any solutions. I absolutely did. I said: if they want there to be a liaison, that should be done within one of the minister's offices. Now, if the member was open to an amendment to his bill to move this liaison to the office of the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services and have it come from his budget, I would certainly be supportive of that.

I would support the member if the member would like to write a letter advocating to that minister to move this liaison and have it created in that office. I will sign on to that with that member. We

can have a bipartisan letter of support because, again, through you to the House and that member, we absolutely support families being able to access these supports and services. But what I will say is that I do not support this bill because it is inappropriate to force this office into the office of the Child and Youth Advocate.

4:00

I'm not disparaging the member in his intention, but I am saying that the means by which he looking to accomplish it, yes, in my view will do harm. Now, I did not allege that member wished to harm children. I made significantly fewer allegations against that member than he chose to make against me, but in the interest of burying the hatchet, let's be absolutely clear, Mr. Chair. I'm not saying that that member has any intention of harming children.

But I will say that impacting the budget of the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, who already had their budget capped by government members, when their chief responsibility is looking out for the welfare of children in this province, advocating for the lives of children of this province, the most vulnerable, taking any amount away from their budget comes with the risk of doing harm. That may not be the member's intent, but I seem to recall we've had many conversations when they were in opposition about unintended consequences, and that is what I'm referring to today.

I also want to address the members' concerns about saying that I believe private members' business has no purpose and no import. Let's be clear, Mr. Chair. It was the UCP government that introduced an entirely new committee solely for the purpose of blocking opposition private member's bills from ever being debated in this House. That is the record of the last term of the UCP government. They did not let a single opposition member private member's bill come to this floor for debate.

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

I had a bill. Coincidentally, my bill was also Bill 206, the Anti-Racism Act. What I was told by government members was that I was too ambitious as a private member for wanting to create an independent office under the aegis of a ministry in the government to address concerns around systemic racism. They said that my bill was not even worthy of debate. It was this government, Madam Chair, that said that private member's business, at least when it came from the opposition, had no value and no weight and should not be considered.

At no point have I said that this member's bill should not be debated. In fact, we are debating it now. What I am saying is that the mechanism that he has chosen to accomplish what indeed could be a very good thing for children and families in this province is not the right one, and I have deep concerns with the impact this has on an independent office of the Legislature and the precedent that it sets.

Now, I'm not going to impugn the member's motives in the way he chose to twist a lot of my words and impugn mine. What I will say is that there is a lot of confusion for me, too. In this member's debate he talks about two different things. He talks about providing support for parents, and then he talks about parental rights.

Now, again, the office of the Child and Youth Advocate has a very specific mandate under legislation to look out for children in the province, specifically children in government care and specifically those who are most vulnerable. Now, if there are concerns about parental rights and how those operate within legislation, again, those are all within the purview of the UCP's own ministers to address. If there are programs that are not respecting parental rights, those are UCP programs currently overseen by UCP ministers.

Again, if the member feels that there needs to be someone in government who has a responsibility for looking after parental

rights, then by all means. If the member wants to put forward a bill that would suggest that that be formed within one of the offices of one of the ministers of the government, happy to have that debate, that discussion.

Again, I do not think the place for that is within the Child and Youth Advocate's office. I would ask: does the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul believe, then, that there should be an increase to that budget, or does he believe that these amounts should be subtracted from the amounts that are there currently to look after some of the most vulnerable youth in our province?

These are the concerns I bring forward, Madam Chair, and these are the reasons that I know I cannot support this bill. Again, I'm happy to work with the member if he wants to find real solutions for parents to be able to access services in this province. I will sign on to any letter advocating to the UCP ministers to fund those programs. I will talk with him if he wants to talk about creating a liaison in any other office, but I cannot support this imposition on the office of the Child and Youth Advocate, this abrogation of their independence. I don't think that's the best use of our resources. That is not the best way to approach this. That is not the best way to address this concern.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join the debate on Bill 206 as amended? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Member Kayande: Thank you for seeing through to the short person here. I appreciate that, Madam Chair.

We've heard quite heated rhetoric this afternoon on Bill 206, the Child and Youth Advocate amendment act. I want to go back to some of the things that my colleague the Member for Edmonton-City Centre said about the purpose of the Child and Youth Advocate. The purpose of the Child and Youth Advocate is to look after the most vulnerable children in our province, so when that effort of looking after the most vulnerable children in our province is bifurcated, when it is collapsed with other needs, what that means, then, is that the Child and Youth Advocate's budget is actually diverted to purposes that are other than looking after the most vulnerable children in our province. Really, it kind of, in my mind, creates a commentary of which children need to be protected, which children are deserving of protection.

What this bill does in its action, regardless of whatever its lofty stated intents are, is deprioritizes the most vulnerable children needing help in this province. In that way it is very similar to how the UCP government has changed how daycare operates, where everybody now gets \$15-a-day daycare at some point in the future, but those who are enjoying lower prices because they have higher needs need to pay higher prices. When you are extremely vulnerable, this government sees those extremely vulnerable people as targets rather than as people needing help, and this is just one more example of that. I do not, Madam Chair, support this bill. I don't think that this is an appropriate way to get parents the help that they need.

Let's talk about the help that parents need and why they need that help. The story that the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul told about his autistic nephews is very deeply touching to me. It is hard, it is extremely hard in this province to have a child with a disability and a child who has greater needs. I, too, have had many conversations with people in my office, mothers in tears because they're not getting the supports that their autistic children need. Supports for autistic children – I did not know this. I was a financial analyst. I was an executive. I was in technology. I was not in any sort of helping profession. And, fortunately, I did not have an autistic child in my immediate family. But apparently, what I've

been told, is that autism requires intervention on a time limit, and when that intervention doesn't appear in the time frame that it is required, there are significantly more challenges for those children in getting their needs met.

This government has been doing a terrible job of making sure that children can access the supports and parents can access the supports that they need. Yet when we say, "Look, don't cut the Child and Youth Advocate's budget for this; instead why not increase the budget for health care, why not increase the budget for social supports, why not get parents the help that they need?" we're the ones who are accused of being antiparent, when I have had mothers crying in my office, begging for help from this government. It's a bit rich. It's a bit rich, and it's a bit irritating.

Now, as many members of this House know, I do have in my life a child requiring additional supports, requiring additional assistance, and I don't need a liaison office. What I need is for her to get the health care that she needs so she can get better. I don't need my child to wait three years for a specialist appointment.

4:10

So maybe I would propose to the members of this government that rather than cutting the health care budget by a billion dollars in real terms, perhaps what they should be doing is ensuring that they actually match the numbers that are laid out in Jason Kenney's fiscal framework. I remember when he was Premier once, and he put a fiscal framework in place that is not being met by the amount of spending that the government is putting into place in the health care and education systems. What my child needs is a HEPA filter in her classroom so that she has a lower chance of getting sick. That is unavailable from this government even though it would make the lives of so many children and parents and caregivers and teachers so much better by getting sick less often. But there's no funding for that. Instead, I get an advocate, or I get a liaison.

Let me just back up here because I find this hilarious, that to make the adviser office more accessible, they're changing the name to something that's French. I find that amazing.

I don't need a liaison. What I need is to get the supports that we need in our family so both of us, my wife and I, can both go back to work rather than spending half of our time managing my kid's illness. Why don't we try that? Perhaps the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul will accuse me of being antiparent, a parent myself, a parent of a sick child myself. Is the debate supposed to be robust and raucous? But it's absurd. It's utterly absurd.

So the adviser, or the liaison – I apologize – is going to be responsible to the parents of over 1 million children. I mean, I don't know what technology toolset that they are going to use to fulfill this function. I would assume that their Twitter, Instagram DMs would start getting pretty full as a result of all of the unmet needs that parents have in this province. And what is the source of all these unmet needs? Well, a lot of them are economic. A lot of them are parents who don't know whether they're going to put food on the table or pay the heating bill. A lot of them are parents who don't know whether they can pay for school supplies and go through the whole process and the rigamarole of going through the school board to get relief on their school fees or whether they're going to actually be able to spend a little bit of time with their children.

And for those, you know, parents who are fortunate enough to be able to put food on the table and a roof over their heads and actually pay their, like, insane utility bills that are going higher all the time: those parents, too, are facing a situation where the class sizes are getting larger and larger and larger. Many parents in Calgary-Elbow are looking at this situation and thinking: "You know what? Eighteen thousand dollars a year for private school doesn't sound like such a bad deal; \$36,000 for two kids."

And even those parents who can afford that don't want to pay that, who are, like, stretching out their retirements in order to get the kids their education that they need: they want a robust and well-funded public education system. Will the liaison be able to help me get that? If I call a liaison and say, "Hey, my kid's high school classroom doesn't have enough desks and chairs for the kids that are in it, so kids are sitting in the hallways trying to get an education as best they can," will the liaison be able to help me with that?

Madam Chair, in addition to, like, the absolute duplicative nature of this office . . .

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and I want to begin by thanking the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul for the lovely trip down memory lane. I think he was an exceptional opposition member and that under the NDP government with the Conservative opposition we got a lot of great stuff done for the constituents in northeast Alberta, including in the riding that he currently represents and also some of the areas that he formerly represented.

I think that when opposition is treated with respect and government wants to work with them on bills, great things can happen. Unfortunately, I don't believe – there was one motion that was voted for by government after government amended it to make it less positive, but we haven't seen a lot of collaboration from members opposite now that Conservatives are in government with NDP in opposition.

I want to reflect on that reality, and I also want to take a few moments to talk about the very important work of the Child and Youth Advocate as it does directly relate to this bill. A lot of the things that are core to the work of the Child and Youth Advocate this government is eroding, not necessarily through this bill, – this is part of it – but also through the red tape reduction act, which we will debate much more thoroughly in this House.

One of the most important functions the Child and Youth Advocate performs – because all of us in this room, all of us in Alberta, are the guardians of vulnerable children who have been taken away from their families and put into care. When those children die, either as children or as young adults currently not long after they've aged out of the foster care or group home system, we as citizens who are responsible for those young people have a moral duty, I would say, to make sure that none of them die. I don't know of any parent who would be okay with their own child dying at age 20 and not saying: what could we have done to have prevented this from happening again?

But through the red tape reduction act, which is such a callous name to refer to this bill that's taking away the rights of young people who have died to have their story told and to prevent that from happening again, that's one thing that's happening in this legislative session. That's a government bill.

I also worry that by downloading more responsibilities onto the office of the Child and Youth Advocate through this bill, we will further erode their ability to do the very core work that they currently have under their duty, to make sure that the stories of those young people are told so that government can learn from those issues.

I, too, want to say that I am a huge advocate of parents being engaged in their children's lives, the parents of children who are apprehended, the parents of children who are living at home with their families, the parents of children who maybe don't live directly with their nuclear parents but live with extended families, still having close and positive relationships.

A lot of the phone calls – I will say that I think we have 87 liaisons as well to government to make sure that the people that we represent, when they reach out to our offices saying, “Government isn’t helping me be my best parent” or “Government isn’t helping me fulfill my moral obligations to provide for an excellent childhood for my children” and “Government isn’t enabling me to be able to pay my rent or get reasonable class sizes or get health care or get child care,” it’s incumbent on all of us as the 87 elected representatives to be those liaisons between government services and the parents that we have the honour of representing.

I want to say that I hope that the government isn’t seeing this proposal through this private member’s bill as an opportunity to derelict more responsibilities on to another office rather than doing the important work as local representatives and local advocates in accessing government programs. I see the minister of children enthusiastically nodding – sorry, Jobs, Economy and Trade – still involved in child care though, I believe. Thank you. Sorry for that confusion.

I’m going to tell you a little bit about one of these fatality reviews that came out recently just last month. It is for Tory, which I assume is a name that has been given in this report to protect the identity of the young person, who was 20 years old when she died of drug poisoning on the streets. Again, responsibility for her protection was at many times the province’s responsibility.

4:20

She spent a good chunk of her formative years in childhood in and out of care and being moved from one parent’s home to the other. I have talked a little bit about her in the past. I think her story is one that speaks to our moral obligations to act on reconciliation and the calls to action. I think silencing these stories and pretending that government has nothing to see here by reducing the opportunities for the office to really investigate – and deep systemic issues that result in things like the death of a child should be a very, very high priority for the people of this province and for their government in turn. However, the erosion, I think, of the ability to focus on these things will be a significant setback for all of us.

I’ll focus maybe just on the last two years of her life. She was 18 years old when she transitioned to independent living placements. She went through two of those. She was evicted four times already by the time she was 18 years old. Her AISH application was restarted but not completed. I’m sure we’ve all had people reach out to our offices for help with these types of things. An investment in more social workers and more people facilitating her getting onto stable income would have gone a long way.

Then at 19 years she voluntarily went to a detox program. She wanted to detox. She wanted to have an opportunity to live a longer and fulfilled life. But she was not admitted, and I expect that that is probably because of lack of capacity that we have currently under the current government in terms of actually investing in the things that enable people who want to make those decisions be able to access those bases. Then she was on the transition to adulthood program. She had an agreement. She lived in a remote community with her boyfriend. She gave birth to a son, who was shortly apprehended. Then transition to adulthood program services ended. All when she was 19 years old.

At the age of 20 she tried to access a virtual opioid dependency program. She was actually prescribed Suboxone and shortly thereafter died, again, on the streets alone.

The system absolutely failed her. I have only touched today on the last two years of her life, but I have talked about other points in her life. The only reason why I’m able to do this is because the Child and Youth Advocate’s office had the time to be able to dig into her history and write a report about her story.

By adding additional workload to that office to serve everyone, everyone that the 87 of us are currently supposed to also be serving, everyone that the government departments, including the Minister of Children and Family Services, are supposed to be serving, by saying, “No, you liaison in another office outside of government, arm’s length from MLAs, arm’s length from the department; you’re going to take on more,” means that we will have less time to dive into the deep and systemic issues that we need to fix as Members of this Legislative Assembly when we bring forward bills to be able to address the issues that – and many of them speak to systemic racism – she experienced literally from the time she was two years old until the time of her death.

While I appreciate that the member – his goal, I think, is to find ways for parents to have more resources and be more connected, to be able to support their kids. I think that that is a laudable goal, and that is one we should all be working to through amendments to the budget, to make sure that we have the right resources and the right staff in departments to be able to do that work.

I will tell you already that the budget for the Child and Youth Advocate is incredibly stretched, and asking them to take on additional responsibilities will mean that other things are moved off their priority list. For Tory, this young Indigenous Métis woman, who clearly wanted to have a full life, wanted to be able to have the joys of living in a community, wanted to be in detox, wanted to transition off the opioid dependency that she developed: the system failed her. I would like the Child and Youth Advocate to be able to invest more time into the systemic issues that we have so that we can fix them as MLAs in this place.

Some of the themes that the advocate said in this report are important to track. Assessments. There are many educational assessments and medical assessments that didn’t adapt in the care that she got along the way. Case planning services for emerging adults: that is a huge one, and of course we know that less of that is happening under the current Conservative government than happened under the previous NDP and other Conservative governments in the past, reducing that transition time for young adults. Collaboration and information sharing and, of course, the toxic drug supply: these are all things that I would love for us to be able to work together on addressing. I do take the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul at his word when he says that he wants to work together. Let’s work together on these things, and let’s actually improve the . . .

The Chair: Are there other speakers? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Member Eremenko: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I’m very pleased to be able to stand today and speak to private member’s Bill 206. I really can’t echo enough what so many of my colleagues have already said today in regard to the incredible sanctity of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate, that they do something that no other department, no other office across the government of Alberta is actually able to provide. For that reason I think it’s so incredibly important to remind ourselves of what the mandate of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate is and what the preamble for the Child and Youth Advocate Act actually states. Bill 206 sets out to amend this particular act, and what is incredibly important is to bring ourselves back, get grounded once more in the preamble of the act that Bill 206, in my mind, doesn’t adhere to. It doesn’t kind of show fidelity to the spirit of the Child and Youth Advocate Act.

The Child and Youth Advocate Act “recognizes that children and youth are our greatest resource.” It confirms that we are “committed to ensuring that the rights, interests and viewpoints of the most

vulnerable children and youth in provincial government systems are considered in matters affecting those children and youth,” and it “recognizes the importance of continual improvement in the provision of services to vulnerable children and youth.”

As my colleague just mentioned before me, the spirit, if I dare kind of assume the intent of the member opposite, of this Bill 206 is one that I think we all share. We want to ensure, of course, that parents are fully supported with the programs and the services – not just talk, Madam Chair; with the real programs and services – that help them care for their children in the way that every single parent in this province wants to do. Some of us have an easier go than others, Madam Chair, to be sure, and that is all the more reason why we have to respect the mandate as laid out in the Child and Youth Advocate Act and the mandate of the incredibly important office of the Child and Youth Advocate.

It is not at all about the spirit in which this private member’s bill is introduced. It is simply this challenge of embedding it within the OCYA that both takes away from the work of the office and then also hollows out the effectiveness of the private member’s bill to do, I believe, what it is meant to do, which is actually to provide parents with the supports and services that everybody is clamouring for.

On both sides of that equation we are actually potentially doing more harm to this system than good, so as my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre here has mentioned, let’s come to the table and let’s talk about the role of a liaison and adviser. I’m kind of indifferent about what it’s called because at the end of the day it’s about the impact, the effectiveness, and the outcomes that that office is able to achieve. That’s what I want to see. If there is any other outcome besides the one that parents feel more equipped and better prepared with the resources that they need to support their kids, it’s the wrong outcome.

We fund what we measure, and I want to measure not whether or not a thing is called a liaison or an adviser; I want to measure whether or not parents can come to my office and the office of everybody else sitting in this room and say: I have felt a difference, a positive difference, in my ability to support my family. Thus far I have not heard much of that in my office of Calgary-Currie, Madam Chair, but I want desperately – desperately – to provide parents with some solutions, and it can be really challenging.

In budget estimates just last week, Madam Chair, the minister was just practically scandalized that I suggested that there isn’t much of a system when it comes to mental health and addiction. Certainly, suggesting that there is no system doesn’t mean that there is no service, but the absence of a system means that a family already under great duress is required, on their own, to find out what they can, and I don’t think that is doing a service whatsoever.

4:30

Now, the member opposite, the individual who introduced Bill 206 – I understand that there are constraints with a private member’s bill. You can’t kind of have a cost associated with what the private member’s bill might choose to address. But how about addressing an absence of a system in mental health and addiction, the absence of a system in the family court and justice system, the absence of a system that actually guides a person through community and social services to be able to access the supports and the early interventions that a family may require? There’s none of that. Parents are really left to their own devices, quite literally to just google: “What’s in my neighbourhood? What’s in my community?” “I’ll have to tell my story over and over and over again until I can actually access the service that might be appropriate for my kid.” That’s not a system. That doesn’t serve.

That is, of course, where I hope every member in this Chamber would be able to provide some casework and be able to provide

some support, but it sure strikes me as a pretty ripe opportunity for government to address a system that would in fact not just help the people that cross our thresholds into our office but would help everybody throughout the province.

Just this weekend, Madam Chair, I was at a really wonderful event hosted by the Calgary Single Mothers’ Society. Whenever they host an event for Mother’s Day or for anything else, I am always delighted to be there and to connect with a deeply committed and passionate community of moms. As a mother myself we have a lot to talk about. As the daughter of a single mother we have a lot to talk about. And I will tell you that at no point did a conversation about an adviser or a liaison come up. What came up is: how do I get educational supports for my kid? What do I do when the people who should be helping my child in the classroom are out on the picket lines because they have to access the food bank to be able to provide for their own families? How do I get the supports for my child? Why is my FSCD timeline two years or more in the making even when they don’t even have a timeline anymore? Where is the education? Where is the health care? Where are the child and family supports? How do I navigate family court and the justice system?

These are the real, everyday challenges that parents require. They need support. Whether you are in the 10th decile or whether you are in the first, it doesn’t matter. Your socioeconomic perspective: it doesn’t matter. Your income. This is a really challenging set of services to navigate, and we can be doing so much better by Alberta families and by parents. So I just wonder. I don’t know why that isn’t – you know, perhaps the member opposite can let us know if that was actually something that did come up as an option. Instead, this is where the member chose to land, burdening the office of the Child and Youth Advocate with something that, one, it is not set up to do nor is it financed to do, and it in fact takes away from the very important services that the OCYA provides.

We’ve talked about educational supports. Let’s talk about culturally appropriate and accessible service. What kinds of commitments have come from government to make sure that we’re providing services, mental health or otherwise, that are in different languages, that are in small and rural communities, not just in our big urban centres? It reminds me of another story that I’ve heard in my office that is just absolutely heart-wrenching, that a family up in northwest Alberta literally had to pick themselves up, move from their community, where they’d been for decades, to come down to Edmonton because the only place they could access for mental health services for their child was at the Stollery. It’s not even halfway up the province, Madam Chair, and the only mental health services for their 13-year-old was in Edmonton?

That is the kind of service, that is the kind of support, that I want to see provided to parents, that if you want to live in a smaller community up north you can still access the services that I can in Calgary because that’s about equity and that’s about fairness and that is about representing our constituents.

The Chair: Are there other members to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It’s my pleasure to join the debate on Bill 206. As happened earlier, there were several social workers in the gallery today during question period, and I gave a member’s statement on social work contributions to this province because indeed it’s Social Work Week and that relates completely to this bill before us. Certainly, social workers work a lot in child intervention services. They work at the Child and Youth Advocate office. They play a key role in working with vulnerable families, parents, and children.

I actually am one of those social workers. I worked in child intervention services for many years, years ago. I was an intervention worker, and I was eventually a supervisor in what we call now the Children and Family Services ministry.

You know, I certainly understand the importance of working with parents. We want to keep families together. We want to make sure that families have the supports they need when they're struggling for lots of reasons. There are lots of challenges out there, and we want to make sure that families have the resources they need and the support they need. I absolutely, completely support helping, investing in parents and families to make sure that children are safe.

So I'm a bit confused, actually, by this legislation because we have a whole ministry that does this or is supposed to do it, and I worked there. I don't know if the member knows this, but you know, I'm just looking at the bill and it talks about the purpose of the adviser. "Support families in nurturing, guiding and fostering the growth and well-being of their children." Absolutely.

Guess who helps with that when child intervention is – you know, the mandate of the Child and Youth Advocate, I was just looking at it. It says:

We help young people involved with the child intervention and youth justice systems to understand and exercise their rights, so their viewpoints and interests are considered in decisions that affect them. When a young person cannot access the services and supports they need within these systems, advocates can help.

It goes on to say specifically, "This includes young people who are receiving services under the Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act." So this is pretty serious stuff. These kids have experienced a lot of negative situations, unfortunately.

Of course, as a parent myself, of three sons, all of them who are adults now, I know it is so important to support our children and to make sure that parents have the supports they need. The Child and Youth Advocate office does specifically work with children who are involved in the child intervention system or the justice system. Since this adviser is supposed to be an employee of the Child and Youth Advocate's office, I'm assuming – and the legislation: I don't see it saying anything different – that that would be the specific population that is served. We're dealing with oftentimes multiproblem families who are experiencing a lot of difficulties. It's not a simple thing.

It's not easy to do any of this work, and professionals need to do it, but when I look at the duties of the adviser, it says, "provide information, assistance and referrals to families for the purpose of improving the well-being of children." Well, that sounds great, but that's exactly what child intervention workers do, or that's what they should be doing. You know what the sad part is? And I know this very well because I have many colleagues and friends that work there. They struggle every day to get access to resources so that they can indeed support parents, to support those children because there is not enough. They have caseloads that are through the roof. When I was on, you know, the first day on the job, I had 32 families, and they said: go for it. That was about it. That's all I had. There was no support for me. I had to just figure it out.

4:40

The way the system works now is not okay, and it's not supporting families. That's where the government needs to focus. They need to make sure that the staff in child intervention have the supports that they need to be able to work with families to ensure that they can support their children. I mean, it seems kind of ridiculous that we need this bill because that is exactly what the Children and Family Services ministry is supposed to do. But because we don't, here we're going to have this side private member's bill that's going to support parents, you know, within the

Child and Youth Advocate office, which many of my colleagues have already spoken about, which, of course, is kind of counterintuitive and doesn't make much sense.

I'm happy to talk about that in a moment, but I just really want specifically the member who introduced this bill and all members of the UCP to understand what this department does within the government. Children and Family Services, you know – this is another from the legislation. It says, "assist families with respect to an education program offered by a school, as defined in the Education Act."

Well, I have a story about that. When I was a supervisor in whatever it was called – I'll call it child welfare for short because that's the generic title of this area of work – there was a young fellow who was in his mid-teens and he was, you know, a ward of the court, right? I mean, child welfare was his parent. In some situations, very sadly, parents just are not able. Sometimes parents don't have the wherewithal. They could have some issues with drug and alcohol addiction. They could have some significant mental health issues. So it's incumbent on any kind of just and fair nation to actually intervene and support children to have the best life possible. Unfortunately, sometimes that does happen. It's not always that parents, you know, can take care of kids. Sometimes they can't honestly, and I've seen it first-hand.

But I was working with one of my caseworkers because I was the supervisor, and there was a program that was for – he was developmentally delayed intellectually, so it was a life skills program, and he was in high school. There was a fee involved for that because they would take the bus. They'd go to grocery stores. They learn how to do the basic things in life. I was told that we would not fund that even though we're his parent. But that's how tight the resources and the government were, and they would not fund it.

This is my manager in child welfare. So I got the child welfare act, I got the School Act, and I took it to my manager, and I said: "Look. We're the parent. It's incumbent on us to pay for this extra fee for this program so that this developmentally delayed young man could get some support." Otherwise he was sitting in the office throughout the school day, and it was abhorrent. It wasn't okay. But I had to fight for that. I had to fight for that. I took it to my boss, and she took it to her boss. Eventually, because I did some homework and I showed them the mistake in their thinking, that child did get that support.

I know professional after professional within that system that in spite of the child welfare system advocates for vulnerable kids, and they advocate for families to support them. That's just one small example. But, sadly, there are so many workforce issues in child welfare: caseloads, as I said, are way too high, lack of resources, and, of course, too, the deprofessionalization that the government has brought in.

Two years ago the UCP reduced the credentials. No longer is a BSW, RSW the minimum credential in children's services. Guess what? Anyone can do that work; it's easy, which is so ridiculous. It does take a professional to understand the complexity in families, and things aren't getting more simple; things are getting more difficult in our society. We need those professionals, but the UCP have downgraded credentials so that, you know, people can be overwhelmed and not really know how to address those issues, and not everyone is going to go get the legislation like I did.

The Chair: Members, one minute remaining in this debate. The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to thank everybody that's presented here today. I will say that Edmonton-Riverview: I

actually heard her loud and clear because I also felt the same frustrations, that she had gone through in that specific example that she had had, with my two nephews, ministries not maybe fully understanding the legislation that they are able to enact. That's why I believe that the Child and Youth Advocate has the ability, the capacity to be able to navigate these legislations along with the parent liaison.

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but the time allotment for this part of debate is now concluded.

I must now call the question on Bill 206.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 206 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

[The voice vote indicated that the request to report Bill 206 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:47 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

For:

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

Against :

Al-Guneid	Hayter	Shepherd
Boparai	Hoffman	Sigurdson, L.
Calahoo Stonehouse	Hoyle	Sweet
Dach	Irwin	Wright, P.
Eremenko	Metz	

Totals: For – 43 Against – 14

[Request to report Bill 206 carried]

The Chair: The committee shall now rise and report.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Ms Pitt: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 206. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official record of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, does the Assembly concur in the report? If so, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. In my opinion, the ayes have it. That motion is carried and so ordered.

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has the call.

Public Transit

519. Mr. Dach moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly recognize the need for reliable government project funding to build a modern, effective, and well-planned public transit network that includes complementary and collaborative municipal, regional, and intercity components to meet the critical and essential public transit needs of the province.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure this afternoon to rise and speak to introduce Motion 519, a public transportation motion. Now, this should be as normal as canoes and Canada geese in the spring. However, in this province, the province of Alberta, reliable government project funding is about as rare as Canada geese in the wintertime. It's pretty sporadic, and it's not reliable. That's why we saw the need for presenting a motion like this, to ensure that the public was reminded that reliable government project funding is something they should be able to expect without even being concerned about it.

But that's not the case, Mr. Speaker, in the province anymore, because of course we know with the green line funding that one moment the funding was there – it was something that you could go to the bank on as far as the minister of transportation was concerned; he publicly made that statement – and then 34 days later that funding, that you could bank on, was yanked. The consequences of that are very, very serious and long term and damaging to the business climate in this province.

The UCP's abrupt and reckless decision to rescind promised funding for Calgary's green line has wasted over a billion dollars that were already invested in the project as well as driven investors and jobs away from the province and really put a very big dent in the confidence level that investors will have in this province for a long time to come, Mr. Speaker, confidence in the province's ability to attract investment and to stick to a promise regarding financing of a major project, the most significant infrastructure project in the province's history. It's something that we'll be regretting for a long time.

The minister and the Premier have made a decision to withdraw funding 34 days after saying that, yes, they're going to go ahead with the project and that the funding was ironclad, and the disastrous decision by the Premier and the minister has not led to a better plan. Instead, they created their own plan without any major consultation with experts, commuters, or downtown business, and it'll ultimately cost the province more without providing Calgarians with what they really need, which is a fully functioning transit line. The UCP has made sure that north Calgary will never see a transit line that they desperately need.

Now, at a time when Albertans need jobs, compromising major projects like the green line is the last thing the people of our province need. The UCP's incompetent handling of the green line shows how they are really more concerned with picking fights with the federal government and others than with actually winning for Calgarians. The UCP government has decided to make this a political issue and in the process harmed Calgarians, and believe me, Mr. Speaker, Calgarians are outraged about this.

Almost daily I've been tabling letters and e-mails from Calgarians who are really, really very upset and angry with the UCP government for making such a boondoggle of the green line, which was in place, ready to have construction start until they started meddling with the alignment for reasons really untold to the world that didn't make any sense. Calgarians are not going to forget it. They're very, very upset about it, and believe me, come election time, this major infrastructure project, the most significant infrastructure project in Calgary's history, in the province's history, that has been damaged almost irreparably by this UCP government is something that Calgarians will not forget.

5:10

It's also a shining example of how this UCP government has been incompetent in handling major infrastructure projects and business in general, handling Alberta's taxpayer money in general. They've been terrible with it. Example after example keeps happening, whether it be the DynaLife fiasco that's unfolding right now or where there happened to be funding for other projects that are infrastructure related, whether it happened to be questions about how roadways are procured, how construction projects are procured in Alberta's highways, Mr. Speaker. Anybody who's investing in major projects in Alberta has a right now to question if indeed they can count on a provincial government which at the last moment might pull the rug out from underneath their feet.

Mr. Speaker, the UCP government has chosen to make this a political issue. The AECOM report is something that was produced but, of course, has not been released in its entirety. A lot of it has been redacted, and parts of it the government refuses to release for reasons unknown. We need to get the green line back on track and end this disaster and provide for the city of Calgary the long-term future public transit system that they've been waiting for, has been in the works and been planned for for over 20 years.

Approximately 300,000 Albertans rely on public transit daily for commuting to work, school, appointments, and social activities. Now, Calgary's green line is considered a highly needed project that would serve over 140,000 Calgarians daily if done right, and it would improve the overall transit system to connect key areas of the city and reduce traffic. It has been held up nearly 10 years with funding being pulled and then restored and alignments being rejected and then new alignments being introduced. In 2019 the Alberta NDP supported this project and committed \$1.53 billion to it. Postelection the UCP slashed green line funding by 86 per cent and passed legislation that allows the government to terminate . . .

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has the call. If you'd like to take any personal conversations into either of the lounges, you would be welcome to do so.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has the call.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would have been surprised, had it not actually happened, that members from Calgary and other parts of southern Alberta who might benefit from the restoration of the green line project weren't paying full attention to my remarks this afternoon.

As I said, Calgary's green line has been held up nearly 10 years with funding being pulled and then restored and alignments being rejected and new alignments being reduced. In 2019 the Alberta NDP supported this project, as I said, committed \$1.53 billion to it. Now, postelection the UCP slashed the green line funding by 86 per cent and passed legislation that allows the government to terminate their contribution; a junior funding contribution, but terminate nonetheless. They've allowed themselves to do it without cause

with 90 days' notice. What kind of strength is there in that type of a contract? With a termination clause, without cause, 90 days, allows a junior funding partner to actually kill the largest infrastructure project in Alberta history. It boggles the mind, and it certainly probably boggles the mind of major investing funders in the province as well, Mr. Speaker, to know that the province is retaining the right to cancel such a major funding contribution with 90 days' notice without cause.

The plans for the Calgary green line, as I've outlined, have changed multiple times over the years, and the timeline of it reads like a start, stop, Keystone Kops type of a scenario. Now, the UCP government has struggled to work with the municipal government to finalize the green line while they racked up the total cost of the project. In 2015 the projected cost of the green line was \$4.5 billion for 46 kilometres with 29 stations and has since grown to approximately \$6.2 billion for only 10 kilometres with seven stations. By the end of 2024 the UCP government had sunk \$1.5 billion of provincial revenues into the green line before withdrawing their promised funding allocation and effectively shutting it down.

The UCP provided a new potential alignment in December that included an elevated track rather than tunnelling, and it's going nowhere. Three different alignments have been proposed: tunnelling, elevated tracks, and at-grade tracks. Right now, Mr. Speaker, evidence shows that the original tunnelling program initially supported by the city of Calgary is as cost-effective as the so-called elevated track, which has not been proven to be physically appropriate because it has such a long runway to get into downtown and it won't ever possibly work.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before the Assembly is Motion Other than Government Motion 519. The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to address the motion, and I want to express my strong opposition to Motion 519, which calls for the government commitment to reliable and consistent funding for public transit projects. Let me start by saying that this motion is unnecessary. Alberta is already making significant strategic investments in our public transit system. The government is already delivering on transit infrastructure, and the last thing we need is more political rhetoric from an opposition that has shown time and time again that it is incapable of effectively managing transit projects.

The member opposite spent a lot of time on this motion to explain about the so-called boondoggle of the green line, and I think perhaps it's appropriate to have a little bit of a history lesson as to what has transpired with that project. The member opposite talked about originally in 2015 a project that was to extend 47 kilometres, from the far north of Calgary to the extreme south of Calgary, at a cost of \$4.5 billion. Now, I would like, you know, the member to recognize and all members of the House to recognize that that project: the costing today is pretty well consensus that it would be over \$20 billion. So it raises a number of questions. You can't go from \$4.5 billion to over \$20 billion because of inflation. That's not anywhere close.

It does raise the question as to: what was going on with city council in Calgary? And who was the mayor at the time? Let me think here. Let me think. He presents a project, \$4.5 billion for a project today that we know would cost over \$20 billion, to extend a line from the far north of Calgary, 47 kilometres, 29 stations, and a certain number of passengers. The provincial government at the time – well, who was the government at the time provincially? – the

NDP government, I assume, did some looking at this project and agreed that they would fund one-third of this project; of course, the federal government providing the other third. But as time went on, no project, no costing, no work.

This was done by the city of Calgary. Again, who was the mayor of the city of Calgary over this period of time? In fact, it wasn't till this government said, "Hey, we need to have some costing on this project" in around 2021 that it was finally recognized that there was no way possible that this project could be done, not within the budget framework that we talked about. So the city of Calgary had to go back and redesign the project and made it much shorter. At that time, in 2021, the city of Calgary proposed that the project would go from 16th Avenue north to Shepard. But guess what? You know, after that, it became apparently clear, not by the province but by the city of Calgary, recognizing that they couldn't do that kind of project for that kind of cost either.

5:20

In July of 2024 the city of Calgary came back and proposed a project: instead of 47 kilometres long, 10 kilometres long; instead of 29 stations, seven stations, going from downtown Calgary to Lynnwood. Now, take a look at a map and try to figure out how many people would want to take an LRT and how much time they would save to go from Lynnwood to Calgary. What's the value of the project if it's not saving people's time, money, and, of course, presumably carbon emissions because people are taking the LRT? If nobody is taking the LRT, you're not saving anything, so where's the value for the taxpayer in that? Recognizing that still the federal government also would have to approve a new revised business plan for this project to put in their \$1.53 billion, do you think that they would have supported \$1.53 billion to support an LRT line that went 10 kilometres with seven stations that nobody took? So, yes, the province had to step in and say to the city: lookit, you know, we're putting in \$5.3 billion of taxpayers' money.

The budget now for this, by the way, shorter 10 kilometre LRT line: instead of being \$4.5 billion or \$5.5 billion, because that's where the cost was by 2021, is \$6.2 billion, which means that the taxpayers of Calgary would have to finance that difference between four and a half billion dollars and \$6.2 billion in addition to the \$1.5 billion they're already putting on. Is that taxpayer value, an LRT line that goes from downtown to almost downtown, that nobody wants to take and doesn't add any value to anybody? So, yes, the province had to step in and say: lookit, we don't think that this particular design is useful.

You talk about the idea of the design that was going to go under downtown at a significant cost and significant risk to the cost because of the geological realities of the downtown area and the water table that exists down there. The river actually goes underneath downtown. This is a reality, and there have been many capital projects that have been built downtown that have gone way over budget with huge technical problems because of this very issue. So the province says: "Hey, let us do another study. Let's look at an option instead of going downtown and see if that money that's saved from going underground can be used to extend the line to make something useful." Instead, we proposed a project that goes from downtown, connecting on 7th Avenue to the Red and Blue lines that go right there, that would go all the way to Shepard instead of Lynnwood, increasing the expected passengers by 60 per cent for the same price.

Again, you know, the member of the opposition: perhaps this motion would be appropriate for the NDP government when they were in government and approved this project without doing any assessment as to whether or not the cost of the original project was anywhere near possible, or the city of Calgary and the mayor at that

time, who obviously doesn't have the ability to be able to ascertain what a project like that costs.

Again, you know, the project is going forward. It is now in the hands of the federal government, that has to assess the new revised business plan that'll add 60 per cent additional passengers, that stays within a certain limit and extends and actually provides some value to taxpayers. We'll see what happens with the federal government. We're hopeful that they will approve this improved project. The city of Calgary council has approved this new proposal. Not everybody on the city council likes it, but the majority have voted for it because they in fact see that there is a value here for taxpayers and it's a worthwhile expenditure.

Yes, this government, people on this side of the House, we do support light rail transit within the cities, but let's do so sensibly, recognizing the value of taxpayers' money. The 2025 budget has set aside \$1.6 billion in provincial funding specifically to support public transit like the green line. These investments are not only modernizing in our transit infrastructure, but they're also responding directly to the needs of Albertans.

When the opposition stands up and demands more funding for transit, we should remember that they failed to deliver on their own promises, and that's not something to be overlooked. We deserve a government that delivers results, not on empty promises. Alberta's current government understands that. That's why we're prioritizing accountable and strategic investments. Unlike the NDP, we allocate transit funding responsibly. We don't let projects balloon out of control, we don't let them become a burden on taxpayers, and we don't let them fail before they even begin. When we commit funds to a project, we ensure that those funds are spent wisely and efficiently with careful consideration of both the short-term needs and long-term benefits to Albertans.

Now, also, let's take a step back and look at local control. Alberta municipalities are best positioned to plan and implement the public transit projects that meet their unique needs. It's not a one-size-fits-all issue. What works in Calgary may not be the solution for Edmonton or Grande Prairie or Medicine Hat. That's why we allow the municipalities the autonomy to develop the system that works best for their residents rather than imposing a cookie-cutter approach, but we do have a responsibility and we maintain the responsibility for the taxpayers of Alberta to make sure that those funds that are coming from the taxpayers of Alberta are going to projects that are worth while.

I urge all members to vote against Motion 519. That's it. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore has the call.

Ms Al-Guneid: Okay. Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and speak on Motion 519 introduced by the Member for Edmonton-McClung. Thanks for all the passion. I almost thought this is an MLA from Calgary, so thank you for representing Calgary here.

Really, Mr. Speaker, what Motion 519 calls for is to build a modern, effective, and well-planned public transit network in Alberta. This motion emphasizes a collaborative approach between the municipal, provincial, and federal governments. All this is important to ensure delivering the province's overall transportation needs.

This is an important motion, because it's calling upon the government to ensure long-term, stable funding – and the key word here is "stable" – to ensure an efficient, connected, and well-planned public transit system that serves the local community, which reminds me of the UCP government's green line funding

debacle with the city of Calgary. As you know, Mr. Speaker, in September 2024 the minister of transportation announced the withdrawal of \$1.53 billion in provincial funding for the green line in Calgary. The government basically burned taxpayer money just like that by shutting down and restarting some of the green line. I do appreciate the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek speaking about taxpayer money and the importance of protecting taxpayer money, but just like that, the government burned through \$1.53 billion.

Let's not forget how, again, the government caused investor uncertainty in the construction sector, which made four organizations, including the Calgary Construction Association, push back against the UCP's flip-flopping, changing the plans. They even had called the UCP's proposed above ground alignment as reckless. These are big words, Mr. Speaker, from the construction sector. Let's not forget to mention how the new plan omitted the green line's northern leg. This omission led to the frustration among municipal elected officials, community leaders, and constituents in northwest Calgary.

Mr. Speaker, the UCP government needs to work with municipalities to build public transit and infrastructure that our communities actually need, not flip-flop, change their mind, and work in this unilateral manner. This is a good motion, because it's calling for the government to provide good public transit for people who don't own cars – yes; not everyone owns a car – or people who can't drive such as seniors, students, and low-income individuals. Public transportation also means less traffic, shorter commute times, so you know we can go back faster to our families and safer, unless the minister likes staying in commute for hours in traffic. I took the bus and the C-Train on a daily basis when I worked in downtown Calgary for four years. It was great. It saved me time and money from the expensive parking in downtown Calgary.

5:30

Good public transit makes good cities, Mr. Speaker. It helps local businesses and boosts the local economy and attracts talent because people want to live in good, livable cities. Good public transit connects people, reduces social isolation, and improves quality of life. I'd like to end by saying that public transit is essential for building sustainable and efficient and livable cities. This is a great motion by the Member for Edmonton-McClung, and I support it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The minister of transportation, the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to take this time to convince every member in this Chamber to vote against this motion, and I'll tell you why. If this motion were to be passed, it would almost give confidence that the NDP knows what they're talking about when it comes to transit, and I don't want Albertans to have that impression because, as you saw through the speeches that just happened, they do not know what happens when it comes to transit here in the province of Alberta.

I'll start with the green line, Mr. Speaker. It was 10 years ago that Naheed Nenshi was the mayor of Calgary and a \$4.5 billion plan to build a 46-kilometre green line from north Calgary to south Calgary got over \$3 billion of federal and provincial funding that's actually through regulation through the province of Alberta and through the federal government. However, Naheed Nenshi did not get it built.

Then two years after that, in 2017, Naheed Nenshi, still mayor of Calgary and yes, unfortunately, the NDP were in government during

this time as well, they cut the green line in half, Mr. Speaker. They cut the north leg of the green line out of the planning and out of the green line's reality. I find it extremely – I can't find the word, but it's very rich that the NDP will say that it is somehow someone other than them and Nenshi that actually cut the north leg of the green line off because you can just go do a quick Google search. Back in 2017 that's where actually the north leg of the green line got cut in half. So it's very hard for the NDP to keep saying that somehow it was someone other than Naheed Nenshi and the NDP that cut the green line in half . . . [interjections] It actually happened in 2017 while the heckling member who was the Health minister at the time was actually in government, so you'd think she would remember that.

Mr. Speaker, we do lots of transit, obviously, here in the province. It's not just the green line, but I am happy to report and let everybody in this Chamber know that the green line is actually going to finally be built after a decade of delay. After 10 years of the Nenshi nightmare, the green line this year will be built. Construction tenders are going to go out. We're going to do a first spike announcement. We're actually going to lay the first kilometre of track on the green line rather than doing a last spike because it's our government that finally got the green line construction started.

But let me talk about Calgary's other very important transit projects that we're also investing in. There is the \$1.53 billion, obviously, that's going towards the green line. There is \$53 million that's going into the Calgary Blue Line LRT towards, well, from Saddle Towne to 88th Avenue northeast. There's also in this upcoming budget, if passed, \$5 million that is going to look at the Blue Line that will connect into the airport in Calgary. All these transit projects in Calgary are very important, and it'll be interesting to see if the NDP will actually vote for this budget that actually commits to public transit funding for Calgary. Mr. Speaker, I know you're going to be keenly interested to see if they do that.

Also in Edmonton, Mr. Speaker. We're also investing \$1.47 billion in Edmonton transit projects. Just to enlighten maybe some of the Edmonton heckling NDP MLAs, there is the Edmonton West Valley Line LRT, up to a billion dollars in funding; there's the Edmonton Metro Line extension LRT, up to \$97 million in funding; and the Capital Line south extension, up to \$365 million.

It is this Conservative government that is investing in transit, so any motion, anything coming from the NDP when it comes to transit is a joke. We're actually building it here on the Conservative side, and that's why – let's support the budget to make sure that all these important transit projects get finally funded here in the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung to close debate.

Mr. Dach: Close debate.

The Speaker: Well done, sir.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 519 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. government whip.

Mr. Getson: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, motion to adjourn until tomorrow at 1:30.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:36 p.m.]

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