



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature  
First Session

# Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, April 14, 2025

Day 98

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

# Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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

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Deputy Government House Leader  
Arcand-Paul, Brooks, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)  
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA,  
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)  
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)  
Boitchenko, Andrew, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)  
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)  
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)  
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)  
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)  
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)  
Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP),  
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Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)  
de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)  
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)  
Dreeschen, Hon. Devin, ECA, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)  
Dyck, Nolan B., Grande Prairie (UC)  
Eggen, Hon. David, ECA, Edmonton-North West (NDP)  
Ellingson, Court, Calgary-Foothills (NDP)  
Ellis, Hon. Mike, ECA, Calgary-West (UC),  
Deputy Premier  
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Government Whip  
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Official Opposition House Leader  
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Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),  
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(UC)  
Johnson, Jennifer, Lacombe-Ponoka (UC)  
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Kasawski, Kyle, Sherwood Park (NDP)  
Kayande, Samir, Calgary-Elbow (NDP)

LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, ECA, Red Deer-North (UC)  
Loewen, Hon. Todd, ECA, Central Peace-Notley (UC)  
Long, Hon. Martin M., ECA, West Yellowhead (UC)  
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McDougall, Myles, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)  
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Neudorf, Hon. Nathan T., ECA, Lethbridge-East (UC)  
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(UC)  
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Sabir, Hon. Irfan, ECA, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP),  
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Tejada, Lizette, Calgary-Klein (NDP)  
Turton, Hon. Searle, ECA, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)  
Wiebe, Ron, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)  
Williams, Hon. Dan D.A., ECA, Peace River (UC),  
Deputy Government House Leader  
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., ECA, Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)  
Wright, Justin, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UC)  
Wright, Peggy K., Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)  
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),  
Deputy Government Whip  
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)  
Vacant, Edmonton-Ellerslie  
Vacant, Edmonton-Strathcona

## Party standings:

United Conservative: 48

New Democrat: 36

Independent: 1

Vacant: 2

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Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and  
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Gareth Scott, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms  
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Mickey Amery	Minister of Justice
Devin Dreeshen	Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors
Tanya Fir	Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women
Nate Glubish	Minister of Technology and Innovation
Nate Horner	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
Brian Jean	Minister of Energy and Minerals
Matt Jones	Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade
Adriana LaGrange	Minister of Health
Todd Loewen	Minister of Forestry and Parks
Martin Long	Minister of Infrastructure
Ric McIver	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Dale Nally	Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction
Nathan Neudorf	Minister of Affordability and Utilities
Demetrios Nicolaides	Minister of Education
Jason Nixon	Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services
Rajan Sawhney	Minister of Advanced Education
Joseph Schow	Minister of Tourism and Sport
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Rick Wilson	Minister of Indigenous Relations
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Andrew Boitchenko	Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous Relations
Chantelle de Jonge	Parliamentary Secretary for Affordability and Utilities
Nolan Dyck	Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous and Rural Policing
Shane Getson	Parliamentary Secretary for Economic Corridor Development
Chelsae Petrovic	Parliamentary Secretary for Health Workforce Engagement
Ron Wiebe	Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health (North)
Justin Wright	Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health (South)
Tany Yao	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Northern Development

## STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

### **Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund**

Chair: Mr. Yao

Deputy Chair: Mr. Rowswell

Boitchenko  
Brar  
Kasawski  
Kayande  
Stephan  
Wiebe  
Wright, J.

### **Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future**

Chair: Mr. Getson

Deputy Chair: Vacant

Boparai  
Cyr  
de Jonge  
Elmeligi  
Hoyle  
Stephan  
van Dijken  
Wright, J.

### **Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee**

Chair: Mr. Getson

Deputy Chair: Mr. Long

Arcand-Paul  
Ellingson  
Hunter  
Ip  
Lovely  
Rowswell  
Sabir  
Wright, J.

### **Standing Committee on Families and Communities**

Chair: Ms Lovely

Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Batten  
Haji  
Johnson  
Lunty  
McDougall  
Petrovic  
Singh  
Tejada

### **Standing Committee on Legislative Offices**

Chair: Mr. Getson

Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Chapman  
Cyr  
Dyck  
Eremenko  
Lovely  
Miyashiro  
Petrovic  
Shepherd

### **Special Standing Committee on Members' Services**

Chair: Mr. Cooper

Deputy Chair: Mr. Getson

Eggen  
Gray  
Hunter  
Metz  
Petrovic  
Sabir  
Singh  
Yao

### **Standing Committee on Private Bills**

Chair: Ms Pitt

Deputy Chair: Mr. Cyr

Bouchard  
Ceci  
Deol  
Dyck  
Hayter  
Johnson  
Sigurdson, L.  
Wright, J.

### **Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing**

Chair: Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk

Deputy Chair: Mr. Wiebe

Arcand-Paul  
Bouchard  
Ceci  
Cyr  
Dach  
Gray  
Sinclair  
Stephan

### **Standing Committee on Public Accounts**

Chair: Mr. Sabir

Deputy Chair: Mr. Rowswell

Armstrong-Homeniuk  
de Jonge  
Ellingson  
Johnson  
Lunty  
McDougall  
Renaud  
Schmidt

### **Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship**

Chair: Mr. Rowswell

Deputy Chair: Ms Sweet

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

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, April 14, 2025

[The Speaker in the chair]

### Prayers

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

Hon. members and those in the gallery who are able, please remain standing as we pay tribute to a former member. As is our custom, we pay tribute to members and former members of this Assembly who have recently passed away.

### Dr. Rajinder Singh “Raj” Pannu January 12, 1934, to January 30, 2025

**The Speaker:** Rajinder “Raj” Pannu was elected as the Alberta New Democrat Party Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on March 11, 1997. He served for 11 years over three successive Legislatures until 2008. After serving as Alberta’s New Democrat Party leader in an interim capacity, Dr. Pannu was the party leader from 2000 to 2004.

Raj Pannu was born in prepartition India. He earned a bachelor’s and a master’s degree from Punjab University, then immigrated to Canada in 1962, where he worked as a schoolteacher in Whitecourt, then Edmonton before returning to academics at the University of Alberta to complete a master’s in education in 1966 and a PhD in sociology in 1973. Dr. Pannu worked more than 25 years as a professor and lecturer in the University of Alberta’s departments of educational policy studies and sociology.

Dr. Pannu once said: every time I move from one stage of my life to the next, I’ve been surprised by the enormity of the challenges I’ve discovered and the opportunities to make some impact. This reminds us of the words used to describe him. He demonstrated passion, dedication to his principles, commitment to his constituents. Dr. Raj Pannu passed away on January 30, 2025, at the age of 91.

In a moment of silent prayer I ask that you each remember him as you may have known him. Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him. 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 Christina Hollingworth, who will perform the anthem in Cree. I invite you to participate in the language of your choice.

[*O Canada* was sung in Cree]

### 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.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, please join me in a round of applause.

## 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 also 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 a pleasure to rise in the Assembly today and introduce members of the family of Dr. Raj Pannu who are here for the tribute. We all know the deep debt of gratitude that every member owes to our families, who serve alongside us. Serving along Dr. Pannu were his loving wife, Swinder Pannu; his daughter, Savi Pannu; granddaughters; Raj’s brother, Barinder Pannu; sister-in-law, Parkash Pannu. They are joined by other members of the family: Dr. Neesh Pannu, Steve Pierson, Dr. Rajeev Pannu, Dr. Shanu Modi, and Milan Pannu. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. [Standing ovation]

Hon. members, we’re joined by a number of other special guests in the Speaker’s gallery today. They are visitors from the Council of State Governments West. CSG West provides a platform for state officials and legislators to connect, exchange ideas, build relationships and share ideas, particularly those with regional-, provincial-, and state-specific implications. I would like to extend a very warm and hearty Alberta welcome to Senator Steve Stadelman of Illinois, Senator Brian Chavez of Ohio, Representative Paul Anderson of Minnesota. And an additional member from Minnesota; my apologies. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, our anthem singer today was an absolute wonderful pleasure to have here today, leading us in Cree. The singer’s name is Christina Hollingworth. She is an 18-year-old singer-songwriter, playwright, athlete, and member of the Enoch Cree First Nation. She performed and performs at numerous events and festivals around Alberta, including singing the national anthem over 100 times professionally: the Edmonton Oilers Indigenous celebration games, Junofest, International Street Performers, and the list goes on and on. She is currently pursuing a bachelor of arts at the University of Alberta. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition has a school group to introduce.

**Ms Gray:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It’s a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members many students from Blessed John Paul I Catholic elementary school in Mill Woods. I had the pleasure of joining them for Read In Week. They absolutely loved the Legoslature that I was able to acquire through your office, so thank you very much. Welcome, students. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Lundy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a school group to introduce, the grade 6 students from l’école Beau Meadow school in Beaumont. I had a chance to meet them earlier and take some

pictures on the steps. I even took a question on tax policy. I told them: the lower the better. I would ask them to stand and please receive the welcome from the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Environment and Protected Areas.

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to all members of the Assembly I would like to introduce to this House Dan McLean, city councillor for ward 13, working hard every single day fighting for common sense and fiscal responsibility for our shared constituents; as well as Vivienne Huisman, VP of sales from Sotheby's International. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**1:40**

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

**Mrs. Petrovic:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through Neil Singh. He's an active member of his community, and he's the UCP president of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I would ask that he please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

**Mr. Ip:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, to you and through you I'd like to welcome Aya Ibrahim, the amazing founder of Chappelle Kitchen Catering, and her husband, Dr. Abdelghany Elebessy; sons Adham and Mohammad, who are budding entrepreneurs. They are a very accomplished family. Chappelle Kitchen Catering has been named the best wedding caterer in Alberta in 2024. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Camrose.

**Ms Lovely:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly more than 60 United Conservative constituency association presidents and their representatives. These hard-working volunteers represent the grassroots of our party and are making Alberta a better place every day. I'd ask that you to all rise and please accept the warm welcome of this Assembly. [some applause]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order.  
The hon. the Deputy Premier.

**Mr. Ellis:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm privileged to rise today to introduce to you and through you a group of dedicated UCP board members from various boards in Calgary. Please rise as I say your name: Joanne Birce, Cynthia Williams, Renee Hunt, Krzysztof Daun, Gloria Wilkinson, Rob Johnston, Rohan Sankhe, Shubham Sankhe, Arti Sankhe, Deryck Greer, Jean Woeller, Hillar Lilles, Gregory Jarvie, and Elena Gadaeva. Please accept the warm welcome from this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to add to your introduction of Swinder Pannu by recognizing that yesterday she turned 95 years old. On a personal note, when I was asking Raj and Swinder for some life advice, they told me that we needed more women in politics and that I should get on it, and I want to thank them for putting me on that path. Please rise, Swinder, and receive the warm welcome.

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

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you and to all members of the Assembly Derek Olmstead and Nancy Bishay from the Market Surveillance Administrator. The MSA is a public agency that promotes fair, efficient, and openly competitive operation of Alberta's electricity and natural gas markets, and they like the Legislature as well. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

**Mr. Long:** Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the whole Assembly my friend Nathan Schneider. Nate is the very fortunate husband of Roxy, proud father of Sarah with an "h," Mackenzie, and Malcolm. He is also the president of the West Yellowhead UCP Constituency Association. I ask him to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

## Members' Statements

### Federal Policies and Energy Development

**Mr. van Dijken:** Mr. Speaker, Albertans are proud contributors to the Canadian economy. We power homes, feed families, and lead the nation in innovation and resource development, but for far too long federal overreach and anti-Alberta policies have stood in the way of our growth and prosperity. Alberta's economic prosperity should never come under threat by federal indecision or bad policy, yet today, as global trade disruptions grow and protectionist rhetoric escalates, the federal government's inaction has left Alberta and Canada vulnerable on the international stage. Alberta's resource development leadership is under threat not because of anything Albertans have done or failed to do but because of Ottawa's reluctance to stand up for Alberta.

Our Premier has outlined nine clear and reasonable demands for the next Prime Minister on behalf of Alberta. These demands will defend Alberta's right to compete, to grow, and to lead. These demands are not partisan. They are practical. They include repealing the no-new-pipelines bills, lifting the B.C. tanker ban, cancelling the federal emissions cap, scrapping the clean electricity regulations, return industrial carbon tax oversight to the provinces, end the ridiculous net-zero vehicle target and the single-use plastics ban, and end the censorship of Alberta's energy sector. At the centre of these demands are demands for respect, respect for Alberta's constitutional authority.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a wish list; this is Alberta standing up for its constitutional rights, its industries, and its people. Alberta cannot afford to be sidelined. I stand firmly with the Premier in her demands to the federal government and in her strategy of direct, principled diplomacy that puts Alberta and Canada in a position of strength on the global stage. It's time the federal government come alongside or get out of the way so that Alberta will remain forever strong and free.

### Investigation of Health Services Procurement

**Member Hoyle:** Mr. Speaker, this UCP government's corrupt care crisis just got worse, and that's why we need a judicial-led public inquiry. We've now learned that the government staff have been instructed to direct any request from the Auditor General to a third-party lawyer hired by the government itself. "Please redirect the OAG representative to our legal counsel Rose LLP." The Health minister claimed this was standard practice and said that the Auditor General had approved it, but this is not true. The Auditor General's office made it clear that they weren't informed of this decision to hire legal counsel, and they don't endorse this approach. This isn't standard; it's obstruction.

The Premier says that the lawyer was brought in to make the process more efficient and to streamline the investigation. Mr. Speaker, lawyers represent their clients. They aren't hired to make government investigations more efficient. They're hired to control the narrative and limit exposure.

At the heart of this scandal are allegations of political interference, insider contracts, and the wrongful firing of the AHS CEO. The RCMP is investigating; the Auditor General is investigating, yet this UCP government is still working to control and mitigate what investigators can see and who they can speak to. The UCP can't be allowed to investigate itself, not when \$600 million in contracts is on the line, not when public trust is crumbling. We need a real independent judicial inquiry; that's the only way Albertans will get the truth.

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

### Council of State Governments

**Mr. Getson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to welcome fellow Midwest Council of State Governments members to Texas north, Alberta, the province of the strong and the free, home of two amazing NHL hockey teams, cowboys, innovators, and a safe, secure supply of energy and food. We're an all-season destination. We're the fastest growing tourism sector, lowest taxes, Rocky Mountains, clean air and water.

Without further delay, I'd like to introduce our friends from the land of the strong and free and the home of the brave: Senator Steve Stadelman from Illinois. This state is known for the Blackhawks, the Bulls, and Metropolis, actually. That's the home of Superman, who was coincidentally invented by a Canadian.

Representatives Paul Anderson and Tom Murphy, from home of the Wild – they'll always be the North Stars to me – the Mall of America, West Edmonton Mall's younger sibling. Many barrels of Alberta energy make their way to Superior, Wisconsin, tankage.

Ohio: home of the Columbus Blue Jackets – I apologize to my friend from there – agriculture; Dayton, where powered flight first took off by the Wright brothers; the state of the home Senator, my friend Brian Chavez, a fellow BILD member from 2024 graduate, and he has a keen interest in building fortress North America with us, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Midwest is one of our largest trading jurisdictions. Much of our energy flows into their refineries and supplies to their local needs. In return, we buy equipment and many finished products from them. Having our colleagues from the Midwest take time to come visit us in person is priceless. We have an opportunity to show them our western hospitality, our industries, our universities, directly interfacing with those who make the province what it is today. We want to ensure that our conversations or common values and interests and aspirations and lessons learned allow us to continue to be valued trading partners for years to come. Fortress North America won't happen by chance. It will take some collaboration to formalize economic corridors between our provinces and states.

Again, I'm thankful to my colleagues in the Council of State Governments who have taken their time to come visit the best province in the country. God bless the U.S.A., God bless Canada, and God bless Alberta. May we stay strong and free forever.

1:50

### Oral Question Period

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

### Investigation of Health Services Procurement

**Ms Gray:** Mr. Speaker, this government promised repeatedly that there would be full co-operation with the Auditor General on the corrupt care probe. That's clearly not true. Leaked e-mails show staff are being told not to speak with the Auditor General, that they must first speak with outside legal counsel that this government has retained. Despite what we heard last week in this Chamber, we now know from the Auditor General himself that this is absolutely not standard practice. Why has the government taken this abnormal step and gagged staff who have information about the corrupt care scandal?

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

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been clear from the very beginning that our government officials and staff: I expect them to co-operate fully with not only the Auditor General but also with Judge Wyant in his investigation. I found out late last week that the Health department had retained a lawyer to assist with document production, co-ordination, and to ensure that staff and officials are fully co-operating with the investigation. I have asked my Justice minister to make sure that that is occurring. It is my expectation that it will occur. There are a large number of documents to co-ordinate, and that's the best method to do so.

**Ms Gray:** What we see is access being blocked to the Auditor General. On Thursday the Minister of Health's office falsely claimed, quote: the process for co-ordinating interviews was approved by the office of the Auditor General, and they were aware that all requests for interviews and documentation would be co-ordinated through legal counsel. This is not true. The Auditor General says they weren't aware and they did not endorse this practice. Why would the government try to gag their staff, make false statements about it, and then try to use the Auditor General's office to cover it up?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Premier has risen.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I mean, we did have a single point of contact within Alberta Health Services, who is their acting legal counsel, and last week the minister identified somebody who could play a similar co-ordinating role in the Department of Health. It's a lawyer that is co-ordinating for the AG; it's a lawyer who's co-ordinating for AHS. Lawyers are uniquely qualified to be able to read legislation, identify the legal requirements, and be able to assist in the document production. There are 13,000 records that have been handed over. The Justice minister is going to ensure the AG has everything he needs.

**Ms Gray:** After weeks of claiming their co-operation can be trusted, the government is now demanding that staff not respond to the AG, that they have to call a contracted legal team first, and the auditor has claimed and shown that this is not a normal practice. Does the Premier understand how corrupt this looks?

This week the Premier told her radio show that the AG could call any staff he wants, which is ridiculous because they've told them not to pick up the phone. Will she return to normal practices and allow all government staff to speak freely with the Auditor General without her legal team getting in the way?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, of course. The Auditor General can talk to anyone he chooses to who is either a current employee or a former employee. The role of having a single point

of access is to facilitate access, not as the members opposite allege. We've been very clear that all the documents that the AG wants, he will get; all of the documents that Judge Wyant wants, he will get. We are looking forward to seeing that review of documents so that we can get to the bottom of if there has been any wrongdoing and whether we need to change any practices.

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

**Ms Gray:** So is the Premier committing to rescinding that memo? Of course, the government is directly implicated in the corrupt care scandal, and it's been months now of desperate attempts to avoid accountability.

To recap: millions wasted on inferior PPE and unusable Turkish Tylenol; bloated contracts for private service facilities; now, lawyers and gag orders to cover it up. The government even prepaid \$49 million for medication it has never received and now looks like it never will. How can the government put gag orders on public servants who should be helping the Auditor General get to the bottom of this?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is no gag order. There are thousands and thousands . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Ms Smith:** . . . of records that have been generated and provided to the Auditor General. There are dozens if not hundreds of staff that are going to be co-ordinated so that they can give their testimony to the Auditor General. You need to have a single point of access for this. We have a single point of access in Alberta Health Services. We're going to make sure that we have the accessibility in Health as well.

**Ms Gray:** The Auditor General was surprised. This is not the way things normally go.

Now the company at the heart of the corrupt care scandal, MHCare, has started writing letters saying their good name is being dragged through the mud. Well, they can blame the government for how they've handled the scandal. Albertans are sick of this cover-up. When will the Premier and government stop interfering in these matters, let public servants speak to the Auditor General directly as they normally do, and call a real public inquiry so Albertans can find out how deep the rot goes?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The legislation is very clear. The Auditor General can ask any employee, former or current, any questions he likes as he is doing the investigation. We believe our role is to assist in being able to facilitate that access. My Justice minister is reaching out to the office to see if there are any issues that the Auditor General has, if there's any material that he needs to have, and will make sure that he has all of the documents that he needs and all of the access to the employees that he needs to get to the bottom of the investigation.

**Ms Gray:** So will the Premier rescind the direction her ADM sent that told staff not to pick up the phone when the AG calls?

The Premier has said repeatedly that she doesn't believe there should be a public inquiry, and Albertans disagree. If we review the facts, we know bloated contracts were issued to companies friendly with the UCP. It includes allegations of kickbacks. We know shady

land deals led to the Infrastructure minister resigning from cabinet. Hundreds of millions have been wasted on PPE and Turkish Tylenol, and now a government gag order has been put in place to stop staff from speaking to the investigators. How can the Premier not call an inquiry?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite continue to mischaracterize what is going on here. The job of the co-ordinator is to ensure that nothing gets missed, to make sure that all of the documents being requested are being forwarded, that all of the inquiries for every person that the Auditor General is asking to speak to are being facilitated. That's the purpose of having a single co-ordinator, to ensure that all of the provisions of the act are being met, to make sure nothing falls through the cracks, and to make sure that every document that the Auditor General wants to see is received by him.

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

### Premier's Leadership

**Ms Gray:** Mr. Speaker, the *New York Times* recently sat down with the Premier for an exclusive interview. They call the Premier "an unapologetic MAGA-aligned conservative," and they describe her as "the closest thing Canada's conservative movement has to a MAGA ally – and has the Mar-a-Lago photograph with . . . Trump to prove it." Some of the answers we've heard here today seem like we're talking to Team Trump even more. Does the Premier believe being portrayed as a MAGA supporter in the United States is a good thing for Alberta and Canada?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad we've got friends from the United States of America. In fact, some of those friends, Illinois: that is the largest trading partner that Alberta has with the state. Ohio: I mentioned to the state representative there that there are some Ohio refineries that get 100 per cent of their oil from the heavy crude that we offer from Alberta. These are messages that our friends in America need to hear. We need to have a fortress North America approach where we know that we can support the Americans in their aspiration for energy dominance. We'll be able to play a key role in that.

**Ms Gray:** Albertans reject these MAGA alliances.

Now, the *New York Times* seems to have gotten a good handle on our Premier. They write, "She has courted ideological minorities, including fervent anti-vaccine organizations, advocates for Alberta secessionism and hard-line anti-trans activists, to secure her election." They continue, saying the Premier "has sought to use the question of Alberta's relationship with the rest of Canada to her political advantage." Why is the Premier threatening a national unity crisis and encouraging separatism in some sort of . . .

**Mr. Schow:** Point of order.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite well know that we have had an office in Washington since 2005. We've continued the expansion of those offices, and we continue to have exchanges like the one we have today so that we can build those relationships on both sides of the aisle. We've got Republican representatives here today, we've got Democrat representatives



here today because we think it's important that, no matter who is in the White House, no matter who is elected to office at the federal level or the state level, they understand the Alberta story, they understand that Alberta is a strong partner and ally in their aspirations. I'm going to continue to tell them that.

2:00

**Ms Gray:** Mr. Speaker, most alarming is this line in the Premier's *New York Times* article. It says, "But the policy area where her alignment with Mr. Trump's movement is most pronounced is probably health." Albertans want public health care, not Trump health care. Albertans want surgeries in our hospitals, not bloated contracts for U.S.-style privatization. Trump's version of health care has people going bankrupt to get basic services. Why would the Premier find herself so aligned with Team Trump when it comes to health care, our most important service for Albertans?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the place where we are most aligned with our American counterparts is on energy dominance, on critical minerals as well as on winning the AI data war. We know that we have an environment here where we can invest in clean, low-cost electricity that will allow us to be able to develop that new sector. We know as well that the Americans benefit from being able to have our heavy oil as a backfill to their needs so that they can keep prices low for their consumers. That is where we have the most common cause with our American friends, and I'm looking forward to continuing to build those partnerships.

#### **Investigation of Health Services Procurement** (continued)

**Ms Hoffman:** The Minister of Justice said that he had faith in the Auditor General's process and would "work with that independent office, a completely independent office, to provide all the necessary documentation and . . . assist in their thorough examination in any way that [he] can," but the senior ADM of Alberta Health is telling employees that if the Auditor General reaches out to them as part of the corrupt care investigation, lawyer up. To the Minister of Justice: does this sound like transparency and full co-operation? Because to most Albertans it sounds like a cover-up.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, my apologies. A point of order was noted at 1:59 and again at 2 o'clock.

The hon. the Minister of Justice has the call.

**Mr. Amery:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Since day one we have said, and I want to be absolutely clear, that we will comply 100 per cent and provide full co-operation to the independent Auditor General in his office and with his investigation. The reality is that any investigation requires proper organization, a single point of entry to help facilitate the records, a single point of entry to help facilitate the interviews. Document production and other materials that the AG requires are being handled at a single point of entry. That is the firm and the agency that has been retained, and it's the appropriate way to do things.

**Ms Hoffman:** What Albertans want is the truth. Weeks after the corrupt care scandal broke, the Deputy Minister of Health was removed from his role and told to solely focus on being the CEO of Alberta Health Services. He let go a long-standing, award-winning public servant, including the chief information officer, and appointed the senior ADM for that job, the same official telling Alberta Health staff to lawyer up. Albertans are telling me that it

looks like the UCP is actually proud of how much corruption the government is showing. Is the government proud of how overtly corrupt it looks to tell public servants to hide from the Auditor General?

**Mr. Amery:** Mr. Speaker, once again, that assertion is completely false. Nobody is subject to a gag order. Nobody has been subject to a gag order. Alberta Health retained a law firm to facilitate the production of 13,000 documents so far and to co-ordinate interviews with the civil service. Rose LLP was hired to do this because it is capable and competent in doing this. In any event, to avoid confusion, the Premier has asked and I've directed Justice officials . . .

**Mr. Sabir:** To cover up.

**Mr. Williams:** Point of order.

**Mr. Amery:** . . . to reach out to the Auditor General and make sure that the interviews and the records are being complied with.

**The Speaker:** A point of order is noted at 2:04.

**Ms Hoffman:** When the former Infrastructure minister resigned, he said, "In recent months, I have voiced concerns regarding the Government of Alberta's procurement practices across all departments," and later today all MLAs will have a chance to vote yes or no on a true public inquiry. It's our chance to tell Albertans if we believe in transparency and accountability. The NDP does so far; the UCP members have tried to lawyer up and shut it down. Who's ready to stop the games? Who's ready to stop the embarrassing talking points? Stand up. Vote with your conscience. Vote for an independent public inquiry.

**Mr. Amery:** Mr. Speaker, when that hon. member was Minister of Health in this province, she instructed her staff to go into voice mode so that nothing would be recorded on paper. This government believes in accountability. It believes in working with the independent offices. We'll continue to do that. [interjections] They can laugh all they want, but the fact of the matter is that we're working with all of the independent investigations. We'll continue to do that, and proof positive has been demonstrated here; 13,000 documents have already been provided to the Auditor General. There are more to come.

#### **Administration of Elections**

**Ms Pancholi:** Mr. Speaker, the Premier has loved hanging out with Donald Trump at Mar-a-Lago and extreme right-wing influencers although all that fangirling didn't save Canada from Trump's tariffs. Now the energy minister is sharing MAGA conspiracy theories at a UCP fundraiser in Barrhead on April 4 on the topic of stolen elections. The minister said, quote: I don't think that happens in Alberta and Canada like it does in other jurisdictions like the United States with the Democrats. End quote. Why is the energy minister sharing extremist MAGA conspiracy theories as if they're credible?

**Mr. Jean:** Mr. Speaker, I think it's fair to say that we should be able to have conversations with constituents and supporters, as we do, on what we believe is happening in other jurisdictions. Much like when I was on that side of the House, I heard about this mode that those folks, the ministers, were asking people to be in in order to discuss things with bureaucrats. I think it was called – what was it called again?

**Some Hon. Members:** Voice mode.

**Mr. Jean:** Voice mode. Yeah.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to take any lessons from them. They make up conspiracies all the time. We have tariffs going on, we have wars going on, we have genocides across the world, and what do they concentrate on? A made-up health scandal. Ridiculous.

**Ms Pancholi:** That was entertaining, Mr. Speaker.

Given that claiming that the Democrats stole the 2020 election is giving in to the worst of MAGA conspiracy theories, which led to the violent January 6 insurrection in the U.S., and given this kind of extremist accusation is false and undermines democracy and given the Premier herself is described in the *New York Times* as "the closest thing Canada's conservative movement has to a MAGA ally," will the minister of energy admit today that he was wrong to share conspiracy theories about stolen elections?

**The Speaker:** I think there are a number of challenges with the question asked by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. First of all, if the member would like to use a preamble, I encourage her to do so by getting in question 1 through 4. After question 4, of course, preambles are not acceptable.

Secondly, it was very difficult to hear any form of question with respect to government policy. There are lots of creative ways to write a question to make it about government policy. That certainly wasn't one of them.

The hon. the Government House Leader, if you'd like to respond.

**Mr. Schow:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I could not have said it better myself. I find the question completely unrelated to government business. This is a time for the members opposite to ask the government about government business. They're wasting time.

What I will say is that the Premier has spent a significant amount of her time across the border, meeting with stakeholders in the United States to reaffirm the importance of Alberta's relationship, our trade relationship, with our neighbours to the south, some very important people who have the President's ear, including Doug Burgum, Interior secretary; Chris Wright, Secretary of Energy; Marco Rubio, the Secretary of State, Mr. Speaker.

**Ms Pancholi:** Given that Trump's tariffs are wreaking havoc on our jobs, our industries, and our way of life here in Alberta and given the Premier has a history of subscribing to all of the greatest hits of U.S. conspiracy theories and turning them into government policy, like chemtrails, banning vote tabulators, and antivax rhetoric in the middle of a measles outbreak, and given that the energy minister's comments should be denounced by everyone that believes in free and fair elections, will the energy minister renounce this apparent government policy to spread false conspiracy theories and commit to restoring democracy, not attacking it?

**The Speaker:** Much better question.

**Mr. Schow:** Well, Mr. Speaker, it is because of the work of members of this government and the government caucus that we have state legislators here in this building today to better understand the important relationship that we have. I welcome them, and I welcome any of their colleagues nation-wide so that we can continue to reaffirm our relationship with our neighbours to the south. Just imagine. If the members opposite were in government, that's the approach they would take to diplomacy. Thank heavens that isn't the case.

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

## 2:10 Postsecondary Capital Projects

**Mr. Boitchenko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's postsecondary institutions are vital to the ongoing growth and prosperity of our province. They deliver internationally recognized, leading-edge research, generating billions of dollars in research and economic activity, providing their graduates with the skills and education they need for successful and productive careers. Given the landmark announcement at the University of Alberta this morning, can the minister please share with us and with this Assembly the details of the announcement this morning?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for that question. This morning I was pleased to be joined by a number of my colleagues to announce that our government is investing \$100 million to redevelop the Biological Science Centre at the University of Alberta. Once complete, the life sciences innovation and future technologies, or LIFT, centre, as it will be known, will be a world-leading hub for life sciences, education, research, discovery, and experiential learning.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

**Mr. Boitchenko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for her great work. Given that our government is building a workforce that is equipped to take on the labour needs of today and tomorrow and given that excellence in the STEM field is essential to the growth and diversification of Alberta's economy, can the same minister please share how this \$100 million investment in the new LIFT centre will enable the U of A to further develop the workforce of the future?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Mr. Speaker, the LIFT centre will double laboratory spaces at the Faculty of Science from 1,600 to 3,200, allowing for nearly 2,500 new domestic students to access undergraduate programs in the faculties of science and agricultural, life and environmental sciences. There will also be approximately 700 additional graduate student spaces. We are committed to ensuring students have access to high-demand programs in important fields, and this investment will do exactly that.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Boitchenko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that response. Given that our government is committed to supporting student excellence across Alberta and given that this monumental investment in the U of A's LIFT centre is just one of the significant investments Budget 2025 makes in postsecondary education, can the Minister of Advanced Education please share how Budget 2025 meets the postsecondary needs of our growing province and expands academic opportunities across our province?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Mr. Speaker, through Budget 2025 we are taking real action to address the demands of a growing province while meeting the labour force needs of today and for tomorrow. On Friday I announced that we are investing \$30 million into the Taylor family campus centre at SAIT, which will expand work-integrated learning opportunities in key sectors like health care. Budget 2025 includes \$530 million for capital investments that will expand capacity and spaces in high-demand programs across our province.

### Parent and Guardian Liaison

**Member Batten:** Mr. Speaker, the changes to the Child and Youth Advocate Act have left many Albertans with questions, including the advocate herself. When asked about Bill 206's proposed parent and guardian adviser role, the Child and Youth Advocate said last week, and I quote: a little confused about why we need this. Unquote. She said she had serious concerns about her office's independence following these changes. To the minister: why is this government undermining the Child and Youth Advocate's work and interfering in an independent office's mandate?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Children and Family Services.

**Mr. Turton:** Well, thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to that member for that question. The entire government of Alberta as well as all Albertans support the work that the OCYA does in looking after and investigating horrendous events that happen to children and youth within the system. That is why I was very happy with the legislative changes that are being put forth to allow the OCYA to be able to become hyperfocused on those children that are truly in care. These are some of the most vulnerable and complex children in the system, and I appreciate the work that our government is doing to support these incredible children.

**Member Batten:** Given that we're talking about the changes that Bill 206 brought and given that the role of the Child and Youth Advocate is to represent the rights, interests, and viewpoints of vulnerable children and to advocate on their behalf and given that this government, having already brought cuts to the advocate's office, is putting further financial strain with the addition of this new role, to the minister: why is this government damaging the work of the Child and Youth Advocate's office by putting vulnerable kids' lives in jeopardy?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Children and Family Services.

**Mr. Turton:** Well, thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Over the last couple of years our Department of Children and Family Services has gone through and met over a hundred recommendations put forth by the OCYA. These recommendations are actually improving the lives of children and families within care. It's incredibly important work that the OCYA does. That's why we continue to support their independent office. We realize that they do very important work, ensuring that children within the child intervention system are looked after and supported.

**Member Batten:** Given that, again, the recommendations would come from paying attention to the children after the age of 18 and this office has changed that and given that the office of the Child and Youth Advocate is an independent body within the Legislature and given that the advocate's independence cannot be maintained when an adviser of the government is operating within its department, when will the minister cut the partisan chaos and stop trying to control independent bodies of the government, especially the independence of the Child and Youth Advocate?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Turton:** Yes. Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the member for that question. Since 2013 the OCYA has issued 115 recommendations for Children and Family Services, and I'm proud to say that CFS has implemented 105 of those recommendations. We value the independence of the OCYA, and

we value the recommendations put forth because we know it's going to make a positive difference in the lives of vulnerable children here in our province. I'm proud of our government's record to increase the budget for the OCYA and look forward to our continued work to support children in the province.

### Child Care Affordability

**Mr. Haji:** Mr. Speaker, in the middle of an affordability crisis this government is eliminating child care subsidy for Alberta parents, that could leave low- and middle-income families paying nearly \$4,000 per year per child. These are parents who depend on child care to work, study, or just get by. The minister says that this is about, quote, unquote, predictability. Do you know what's predictable? It's the harm to vulnerable families. To the minister: why is this government forcing the lowest income parents to pay more for child care in the middle of an affordability crisis?

**Mr. Jones:** Mr. Speaker, over the last three years our government, in collaboration with the federal government, has successfully reduced the cost of licensed child care for zero to kindergarten age by 80 per cent. That means that as of April 1 parents are only paying 20 per cent for high-quality child care all across this province. The former subsidy, which predated this 80 per cent reduction in child care fees, was between \$106 and \$266; the new regime, \$900 savings per month on average per kid, \$11,000 in savings per year.

**Mr. Haji:** Given that this government promised affordable child care but now thousands of families are seeing their costs go up, not down at all, and given that the UCP has pushed thousands of dollars in new costs onto low- and middle-income parents, why is this government eliminating the targeted subsidies for families who need them the most and shifting or transferring costs onto parents during the worst affordability crisis?

**Mr. Jones:** Mr. Speaker, the majority of parents will see a reduction in fees through these changes. In addition, we've ensured that 85 per cent of child care providers are seeing an increase in response to the increased costs of providing high-quality child care after inflation and high interest rates. We're supporting the whole system, from providers to parents and also early childhood educators. We're also providing record funding to family day home agencies because we know that family day homes are a nimble and quick way to address child care shortages in rural and remote regions of the province.

**Mr. Haji:** Given that the lowest income families, who once used to pay zero dollars a month for child care, are now being asked to pay \$350 per month per child and given that, on top of that, new charges for meals, field trips, and transportation were put in place and given that these new child care costs will push parents out of the workforce and out of postsecondary education, which will negatively impact our workforce and our economy, to the minister: why is this government today miserably failing on delivering an affordable and quality child care system?

**Mr. Jones:** Mr. Speaker, no parent can be forced to pay for optional services, and optional service charges cannot be charged for core child care.

Mr. Speaker, the federal government's agreement underfunds this child care system to the tune of \$5 billion over the next five years. It also prevents us from targeting the majority of benefit to the lowest income households in Alberta. This isn't just me speaking or the government of Alberta; all the provinces and territories are saying that the agreement is too rigid to create the

spaces required. That's why we're not creating enough across Canada, and it's underfunded, which is why every province and territory is asking for more funding.

## 2:20 Trade with the U.S. Midwest

**Mr. Hunter:** Mr. Speaker, Alberta's economy is deeply connected to the American Midwest. Our energy, agriculture, and manufacturing industries support hundreds of thousands of jobs in Alberta and across North America. We supply essential goods and resources that drive economic and employment growth on both sides of the border. To the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation: can you please explain how Alberta's industries directly contribute to employment and economic growth in the Midwest? [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

The hon. the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation.

**Mr. Sigurdson:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for such a great question. Of course, on this side of the House we understand that the U.S. is Alberta's most important trade partner, and we are committed to growing this relationship, especially within the U.S. Midwest, a key agricultural hub. For example, last year Alberta shipped \$389 million in ag products to Illinois, including \$251 million in beef. This highlights how much the Midwest is a key partner with Alberta agriculture, especially our beef sector, and as the global demand for food is estimated to grow by well over 50 per cent, it's critical for us to protect free trade and grow this . . .

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

**Mr. Hunter:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his response. Given that Alberta exports \$9.4 billion in agrifood products to America each year, supplying Midwestern states with top-quality beef, grain, and oilseeds, and further given that Alberta is a reliable, stable, and sustainable supplier, to the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade: why should Midwestern states deepen their agricultural partnership with Alberta?

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

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you for the question. Alberta does export \$5 billion worth of agrifood products to the U.S. every year, including our top-quality beef, grain, and oilseeds. This makes Alberta not just a reliable supplier but a partner that Midwestern states can count on. With Alberta's stable and sustainable practices we're helping to meet growing demand for high-quality food products in the U.S. Midwest. It's more than just a trade deal; it's a partnership built on trust and the shared goal of economic growth and food security. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

The hon. member.

**Mr. Hunter:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that Alberta has the lowest corporate tax rate in Canada and one of the best places in North America to do business and given that American companies are looking for a stable opportunity with a high skill force, can the same minister explain why companies from the Midwest should choose Alberta as their top destination for investment and expansion?

**Mr. Jones:** Mr. Speaker, in 2024 Alberta exported over \$70 billion worth of goods to the U.S. Midwest, including over \$60 billion in crude oil. Alberta offers American companies a unique opportunity.

We have the lowest corporate tax in Canada at 8 per cent and a highly skilled workforce, with over 500,000 people employed in skilled professions in industries ranging from technology to energy. With American companies seeking stability and growth, Alberta is the ideal place to expand. The numbers speak for themselves. Alberta's business-friendly environment is fuelling job creation and economic opportunities, making it the top destination for investment from the U.S. Midwest.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has a question to ask.

## OCYA Investigations of Deaths of Youth in Care

**Ms Sweet:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 38 will prevent the Child and Youth Advocate from investigating youth who have died to the age of 20 when she could previously investigate up to the age of 24. Vulnerable youth aren't red tape, and refusing to report their death doesn't make them any less real. This legislation shows this government no longer wants to be held accountable when youth in care die, and they refuse to address the problem. To the Minister of Children and Family Services: why is this government choosing to stop reporting when youth over the age of 20 die in care?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Children and Family Services.

**Mr. Turton:** Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the member for that question. I look forward to hearing the debate here in the Legislature when it comes to the bill in the member's question, but the Ministry of Children and Family Services is committed to ensuring that children that are within care are looked after, are supported, and are cared for. These are some of the most vulnerable and complex children. We want to ensure that our ministry as well as the OCYA are hyperfocused on those children that are within care that are under the age of 18.

**Ms Sweet:** Given that in the last two years alone 171 Albertan youths died or were seriously injured in government care, 88 in 2023, and 83 in 2024 – those are the highest numbers ever recorded – given that this government is gutting the mandatory reporting that brings these tragedies to light and reveals the need for systemic change to make sure Albertan youth are no longer dying in care, why is this minister calling oversight “red tape” as he hides the failures that have caused young Albertans their lives when we are facing record high deaths and injury?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the minister.

**Mr. Turton:** Well, thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. You know, our government remains committed to ensuring that those children that are within care receive the supports and services that they require, and that's why we invest historic numbers to our family resource networks. We have increased funding for child intervention services because we understand that these kids need support, and that's why our government will continue to support these women, these children within the purview of the Ministry of Children and Family Services because these adults continue to receive supports. That's why we have a host of different programs that will support them as they age out of care.

**Ms Sweet:** Given that Indigenous youth are vastly overrepresented in deaths, 64 per cent in the last year and 76 the year before while they only represent 7 per cent of the general population, and given that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's first five calls to

action are about child welfare but this government is walking away from its responsibility to true reconciliation by ending public reporting for youth over 18, to the minister: how can the government claim to care about reconciliation while they abandon Indigenous youth and ignore the TRC's calls to reconciliation? [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order.  
The hon. the minister.

**Mr. Turton:** Well, thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Our government remains committed to ensuring that those children under the age of 18 receive the supports that they require because we know that if we can empower these young children, these vulnerable and complex kids at earlier ages, they will be better and more resilient when they age out of care over the age of 18. There is a wide variety of different services and programs for young adults over the age of 18 that we will continue to support, but our ministry will remain focused on those children under the age of 18 to ensure that they receive the care that they require.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

### Economic Corridors

**Mr. Dyck:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some of my colleagues have tried to claim the title of God's country for their constituencies. While I appreciate their enthusiasm, the sheer abundance of resources in our province should make one thing clear: all of Alberta is God's country. However, Alberta is also a big province. Despite having a larger landmass than France, we have less than 10 per cent of their population and are landlocked. This poses an issue as resources are meaningless if we can't get them to market. To the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors: what are economic corridors, and why are they critical to unlocking the economic growth of Alberta?

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

**Mr. Dreeshen:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, Alberta is God's country, but God's country is landlocked, and that means we need economic corridors. We, obviously, have to be in the business of making friends to be able to get our products around the world. Last year alone Alberta exported \$161 billion just to the U.S.; \$120 billion of that was oil alone. That's tens of thousands of great paying jobs in Canada and the U.S. For years Alberta has been on Team Canada. We've been wanting to build big projects across this country, and we'll continue to do so.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

**Mr. Dyck:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that another of Alberta's many blessings is the beef we eat and the exceptional ranchers that produce it and given that Alberta's beef is renowned for its quality across the world and further given that Alberta's meat exports to the U.S. Midwest in 2023 exceeded \$600 million, resulting in prosperity for beef-producing areas like the Peace region and across Alberta, to the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors: how has our government supported Alberta's ranchers by ensuring we have the infrastructure they need to get their beef to markets like the American Midwest?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister of transportation.

**Mr. Dreeshen:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's beef producers have exported over \$600 million of beef just last year, and obviously our road network and market access, road access are important. That's why we're co-ordinating with municipalities to make sure that we can have road access, that's a market road that goes through a municipality into a provincial highway network. We're also working with the federal government on border crossings to make sure there's more access and more trade opportunities. We've been supporting Alberta industries, unlike the NDP who have been propping up the Liberals for the last 10 years amid attacking Alberta industry and jobs. We'll stand . . .

2:30

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

**Mr. Dyck:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that economic corridors promote trade between different provinces, states, and countries through mutual economic benefits and given that in the absence of leadership from the federal government Alberta has been the leader in advancing economic corridors and given that the U.S. Midwest is a top trading partner for Alberta with bilateral trade totalling more than \$100 billion in 2023, to the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors: how has your ministry worked to maintain and expand the transportation infrastructure which enables these important trade relationships?

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

**Mr. Dreeshen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've signed economic corridor agreements with Saskatchewan and Manitoba as well as the Northwest Territories to harmonize our regulations across our borders as well as to advocate for big projects. We support Albertans; however, when you look at who the NDP supports, it's the federal Liberals. The NDP MLA from Edmonton-Ellerslie, their colleague and former NDP leadership candidate in the province, left Nenshi and the NDP to run for the Liberals in the federal election. How is that loyalty rewarded? The Liberals kicked him out because he was too extreme. The real reason why the NDP called for a by-election is trying to get him back in their own caucus. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order.

### Surgery Wait Times

**Mr. Ellingson:** Jennifer Rebello waited four years for knee surgery. She paid thousands of dollars out of pocket for pain injections and missed her mother's funeral because she was unable to travel. Cindy Seerup's 77-year-old husband waited three years for hip surgery, but since their surgeon retired in 2024, he's back on the wait-list for a consultation. Sandra Walker's surgery was pushed to September 2026, meaning she can't take care of her son who has cerebral palsy. Calgary-Foothills residents are experiencing the health care crisis first-hand. Why won't the UCP fix wait times for surgeries?

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

**Member LaGrange:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for that question. Surgeries are immensely important. I know that the members opposite when they were in government actually saw their numbers rise. The wait times actually rose when they were in government, but we're very committed to making sure we address wait times. In fact, we are going to have 316,000 surgeries done this

year. That's 6,000 more than last year, and that is additional, on top of the ones that were done previously. We're going to make sure that all hands are on deck to make sure those surgeries do happen.

**Mr. Ellingson:** Given that the UCP government has been in government for six years and gone through four different AHS CEOs in the last three years, given that this government even denied Popsicles for kids with cancer to save a few bucks, given that Jennifer described her experience with the UCP's health care system as inhumane, will the minister admit that having so many Albertans stuck on wait-lists while their health keeps deteriorating means that this government is failing them?

**Member LaGrange:** Mr. Speaker, none of that is true. In fact, we are doing more surgeries in clinically approved times than we were previously. When I took office, we were doing about 40 per cent of those surgeries in clinically approved times. Now we're over 60 per cent. That's with the biggest growth in our province in decades. We are seeing more people come to the province, and we have an aging population. We're going to continue to address those backlogs because we won't stop until a hundred per cent are done in clinically approved times.

**Mr. Ellingson:** Well, given that everything that I said was true and that the UCP allegedly pushed AHS to sign bloated surgical contracts to their preferred vendors, given that the UCP directed government employees to call their lawyer instead of taking part in the Auditor General's investigation, given that the government appears to be putting more effort into protecting themselves from a scandal than saving Albertans' lives, when will the UCP government focus on funding public health care for life-saving surgeries instead of bloated contracts for their friends?

**Member LaGrange:** Mr. Speaker, do you know what was true, that when the members opposite were in government wait times for cataract, hip replacement, and knee replacement surgery all rose by over 30 per cent. Over 30 per cent. We now have over 60 per cent in clinically approved times. We won't rest until that's 100 per cent. When the members opposite were in power, they had 40,000 surgeries done by chartered surgical facilities. We're over 62,000 and counting. They're all publicly funded surgeries.

### Conservation Holdbacks on Water Transfers

**Dr. Elmeligi:** The South Saskatchewan water basin is overallocated. That means that the government has promised more water to people and businesses than the basin can sustain. In 1996 government created a 10 per cent holdback on water licence transfers to help increase flows of highly allocated rivers by a small amount to help off-set this increase in use. The UCP government recently announced ending these holdbacks in the South Saskatchewan basin, calling them unnecessary. To the minister: are these rivers no longer overallocated? Why remove these holdbacks now?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas.

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do want to thank the member opposite for that question. This is a change that we made to reflect the feedback we've heard over the last number of months when we've been out engaging Albertans when it comes to how we manage and allocate our water. In some cases this 10 per cent holdback was creating a reduction in the available water for a single irrigator or a single municipality. It just didn't make sense.

We still have the ability to do so if we need to protect biodiversity and aquatic life, but we need a lot more common sense when it comes to maximizing our water allocations.

**Dr. Elmeligi:** Given that what makes sense, Mr. Speaker, is leaving some water in the river and that the Alberta government recognizes that rivers need to retain 85 per cent of their natural flow at any given time to ensure all downstream users from cows and fish and people have the water they need to survive and thrive and given that in recent years water users within the Oldman and Bow have consumed more than 50 per cent of the natural flow and given that these holdbacks are an essential conservation tool to restore our precious watershed, who is the minister making water available to?

**Ms Schulz:** Mr. Speaker, I would use the example of a municipality who after a number of water transfers had reduced in some cases the amount of their allocation that they had remaining to them, same user, same system, same basin, by over half. That's unacceptable when municipalities are stepping up to provide much-needed water for their residents. We've heard the same from farmers and irrigators all across southern Alberta. We still maintain the ability to hold back 10 per cent where aquatic life and biodiversity is impacted, and we'll do that, but this is a more common-sense approach.

**Dr. Elmeligi:** Given that these basins are overallocated, the 10 per cent holdback does make sense right now, given that the 2024 Auditor General's report on surface water management found the government lacks effective processes to manage surface water allocation and use, given that the latest report on surface water quality in the South Saskatchewan region found a reduction in water quality from past years, partly because of excessive use, given the harsh realities of climate change which prolong the drought cycle and increase water insecurity, we need now more than ever to protect our rivers, why is the minister choosing not to?

**Ms Schulz:** Mr. Speaker, over the last number of months both myself and my department have been travelling across Alberta and hearing from Albertans on how we could do a better job of managing and stewarding the resources we have when it comes to water. When it comes to this 10 per cent holdback, this was a common-sense change to reflect what was actually happening out there, whether that's producers, irrigators, or municipalities. This was a common-sense change. Again, we can still hold back 10 per cent if we need to for environmental reasons, but this is going to make a whole lot more sense for water users . . .

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

### Government Policies

**Mr. Wright:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is known across the world for its innovative spirit and forward-thinking mindset with evidence-based best practices across a variety of sectors. In February I had the opportunity to travel to Oregon with the Pacific Northwest Economic Region and have meaningful conversation with U.S. partners focusing on both economic and social policies to both support Canada and our neighbours to the south. Included in this work is what our government is doing for those suffering from the deadly disease of addiction. To the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction: how is Alberta leading the world with best practices when it comes to supporting recovery?

2:40

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

**Mr. Williams:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to that member for the question. Alberta is doing something remarkable that the rest of Canada isn't. We're supporting recovery and not facilitating addiction, which is why we're partnering with a number of different experts right here in Alberta. We have Dr. Day. We have Dr. Charl Els, Dr. Rob Tanguay but also, of course, international experts from looking at universities like Stanford and Harvard and Yale who are partnered in research with the province.

We have the world's first virtual opioid dependency program with same-day access to evidence-based opioid agonist therapy. We have therapeutic living units, first of their kind that we've seen in Canada, with treatment in facilities of our correctional centres and, of course, our partnership with Indigenous. All of this is groundbreaking and pushing forward.

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

**Mr. Wright:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta continues to lead the way with best practices around livestock tracking, which works to track the movement of animals or food products through production, processing, and distribution stages, and given that Alberta is leading the way in sustainability, technology, and economic opportunity, especially in our agriculture sector, to the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation: what steps can we take to encourage collaboration to ensure that both Alberta and the U.S. benefit from livestock tracking?

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

**Mr. Sigurdson:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member. Of course, traceability and monitoring are essential to protecting the livestock industry, and that's why in our Budget 2025 we have invested \$3.1 million to the UCVM veterinary diagnostic laboratory and \$1.2 million to Canada's foot-and-mouth disease vaccine bank. Now, this funding is crucial to protecting animal and human health as well as market access. We believe, in our government, that we should lead by example, but we also promote joint pilot projects, cross-border partnerships, enhanced data sharing agreements with U.S. counterparts, and aligning traceability standards.

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

**Mr. Wright:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the growing threats of wildfire, Alberta has to innovate with best practices and innovations such as our use of drones and fighting forest fires at night and given how closely both the U.S. and Canada work together for forest firefighting issues and further given that we are increasingly relying on modern technologies like AI and remote sensing to manage and protect our forests, to the Minister of Forestry and Parks: how does Alberta continue to lead the way with innovative policies and technologies, helping both Canada and the U.S. tackle shared challenges like wildfire risks and forest conservation?

**The Speaker:** I might just remind the member that the first question should be related to the second and third questions. I find some challenge making a connection. [interjections] Order. Order. Order.

The hon. the Minister of Forestry and Parks.

**Mr. Loewen:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the question. Each year Alberta reviews and refines its wildfire strategy, incorporating the latest advancements in technology to enhance preparedness and response. We work with our partners in the United States to share back-and-forth analysis of new equipment and products, satellite data, and wildfire analysis, which

strengthens our ability to monitor and manage wildfire risk. Also, we share firefighters and resources back and forth, most recently with Alberta wildland firefighters going to California. This cross-border collaboration is essential as wildfires don't recognize borders, and strong relationships help us protect our forests and communities on both sides.

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

## Members' Statements

(continued)

### Investigation of Health Services Procurement

**Member Eremenko:** Why does the UCP insist on picking fights with all the wrong people? The Auditor General is not the enemy, Mr. Speaker. Extreme alt-right, racist podcasters endorsing the annexation of Canada: now, they are the enemy. But what does this government do? They promote fundraisers for the podcaster and obstruct the authority of the Auditor General. These are the government's priorities.

Mr. Speaker, I have immense respect and gratitude for the office of the Auditor General. The AG audits financials, but they also provide qualitative measurement and evaluation of programs to determine if they are achieving what they're meant to do and if our financial house is in order. Recent allegations of political interference concerning procurement in chartered surgical facilities plus mistakes worth \$70 million like the Turkish Tylenol fiasco have meant that Albertans must lean on the expertise of the AG more than ever.

For weeks the Minister of Justice said that his government has been fully co-operating with the Auditor General's investigation, but just last week we learned that the government is directing employees of Alberta Health to contact the government's lawyers before anyone talks to the AG. The UCP claims this is standard practice, but the Auditor General says: absolutely not. He's been in the office of the Auditor General in some capacity or another since 1989, Mr. Speaker. He's been privy to investigations longer than some people in this Chamber have been alive. When the AG says that lawyers participating in investigations is not the standard, I believe him.

It's all so shady and corrupt, and Albertans know it. They may not follow the twists and turns in this statement of claim or that procurement contract, but they can confirm that something isn't right, and their intuition about this government is spot on. When civil servants are gagged and instructed to go through government counsel first, there is something to hide. Albertans have had enough.

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

### Council of State Governments

**Mr. McDougall:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great honour to rise in this Chamber today on the first of a two-day visit by the Midwest Council of State Governments delegation to Alberta and to warmly acknowledge the presence of our esteemed guests previously seated in the Speaker's gallery. Alberta's future is stronger when we build principled, co-operative relationships beyond our borders, especially with our largest trading partner and closest ally, the United States. Our direct engagement with U.S. lawmakers allows us to advocate for Alberta's energy sector,

support agriculture producers, and find common ground on shared issues like border infrastructure, environmental stewardship, and trade access.

As one of Alberta's government representatives to CSG Midwest I have the honour and responsibility to engage directly with legislators from across 11 U.S. Midwest states. Like us, they are also committed to delivering results for their communities and strengthening regional partnerships. The CSG Midwest visit represents an opportunity to advance discussions on energy co-operation, food security, cross-border investment, and continental economic resilience. From Alberta's oil sands to the Great Lakes of the Midwest our regions are deeply linked not just by geography but by shared values, industries, and ambitions.

Mr. Speaker, these transboundary relationships matter. As Alberta continues to grow, so must our role on the international stage. That's why our government is proud to send committed, principled representatives to forums like the CSG, where we can ensure Alberta's voice is heard not just in Ottawa but also in Washington, Chicago, Madison, Minneapolis, and beyond. By actively participating in forums like CSG Midwest, we are laying the groundwork for continued collaboration and mutual success.

To our friends and colleagues visiting from across the Midwest, welcome to Alberta. We are honoured by your presence, and we look forward to building even stronger ties in the years ahead.

#### AISH Client Benefits

**Ms Renaud:** Cruel, corrupt, and dangerously incompetent: that is a perfect description for this UCP government. Under this Premier's leadership corruption has infected all areas of governance. Conspiracy theories are like candy to this Premier, and she's got a sweet tooth. Backroom deals and blatant cronyism are the norm. Almost daily we hear breaking news about this government's corruption, ridiculous spin, missteps, and bad decisions that will cost us millions.

While the powerful and connected cash in, those on the margins are being left behind. This Premier has decided that severely disabled, low-income people surviving on AISH do not need the new \$200 federal benefit, so she's taking it away. She's clawing it back. It would cost nothing to let people who live in deep poverty keep \$200 the feds are giving them. The callous cruelty was on full display when this government said that AISH, at \$1,901 per month, is generous enough for a disabled person to live on. While the Premier's allies rake in public money, the most vulnerable people in this province go without medication, equipment, and their diet will consist of what they get from the food bank.

Under this Premier's direction life for people with disabilities is getting worse. Families and futures are being harmed because of bad policy and funding cuts. Structural changes are being made to programs like AISH while the misinformed minister struts around spewing misinformation about autism diagnostic rates to justify brutal cuts. These are cruel, incompetent choices, not accidents. This Premier wants Albertans to believe this is as good as it gets, and we know that is not true. We know that better is possible, and it is coming.

2:50

#### Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

**Mr. Yao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund it is an

honour to table the committee's annual report covering its activities for the 2024-25 fiscal year. This report fulfills the requirements of Standing Order 55 and section 6(4)(c) of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act. The report will also be made available on the Assembly website.

Thank you very much.

#### Notices of Motions

**The Speaker:** The Government House leader.

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill 53, the Compassionate Intervention Act, sponsored by the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

#### Tabling Returns and Reports

**The Speaker:** Are there tablings? The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a letter from the National Police Federation in which they express their disappointment with the minister of public safety for "misinformation and politically motivated rhetoric" in his remarks on April 10. They note that they will not stand by while misinformation undermines public confidence in policing or disrespects the thousands of dedicated RCMP members who serve Alberta every day.

**Mr. Dyck:** Mr. Speaker, I rise to table five requisite copies of a *National Post* article titled OnlyFans Creator Who Joined NDP Campaign Trail Dropped over 'Disrespectful' Holocaust Video.

As well, I table five requisite copies of an article titled NDP Candidate's Remarks on Jews Spark Controversy.

I also rise to table five requisite copies of an *Edmonton Journal* article where the Jewish community had to condemn comments made by the NDP, in this case NDP leadership candidate and union boss Gil McGowan.

**The Speaker:** Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Member Arcand-Paul:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite copies of the Reconciliation Implementation Act petition where hundreds of Albertans wrote this government to urge them to pass Bill 209, the Reconciliation Implementation Act.

**Member Irwin:** Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table an article by Dr. Nick Falvo. He is talking about some of the issues around community-level homelessness planning, particularly in light of the December 2024 funding decision by the UCP government. I urge all members to read this article.

**Mr. Guthrie:** Mr. Speaker, I have a number of documents for tabling, but to properly represent my constituents, I cannot be held in perpetuity to a suspension from caucus which comes with a gag order. I am now at day 48 of my so-called 30-day suspension, impeding my democratic right to fully represent the people of Airdrie-Cochrane.

Mr. Speaker, my first tabling is an article entitled Government Tries to Deflect Auditor General to Lawyers – No Way, Says Doug Wylie by Don Braid, highlighting the muzzling of government officials. Braid states the "procurement scandal is fast morphing into one of the most epic legal battles Alberta has ever seen." This highlights some of the very reasons I resigned from cabinet and why I called for a judicial review, co-operation with the RCMP, and our



government's full support of the investigation of the Auditor General.

My second tabling is an article from April 12 entitled One Inquiry to Rule Them All, where the authors state, "the only way to achieve full transparency is through a judicial public inquiry . . . ensuring Albertans receive the truth."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order.

The hon. member will know that tablings are to be used not for members' statements but for the presentation of documents. It sounded an awful lot like one.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today, articles that I referenced in my question period questions today. The first is an article in the *Rocky Mountain Outlook* dated April 12, 2025, titled UCP MLAs Address Federal Election Safety, in which the energy minister is quoted as saying, "I don't think that [stolen elections happen] in Alberta and Canada like it does in other jurisdictions, like the United States with the Democrats."

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is an article dated April 14, 2025, from the *New York Times* titled Danielle Smith, the Premier of the Oil-rich Province of Alberta, Takes Pride in Her MAGA Ties.

**The Speaker:** Are there others?

Seeing none, I have a tabling. I would like to table six copies of the Constituency Services Amendment Order, 2025 (No. 2), that was passed this morning at the Members' Services Committee. I'd like to thank all members for their judicious and expedient work. As always, the finest committee in the land.

### Tablings to the Clerk

**The Clerk:** I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of hon. Ms Smith, Premier, President of Executive Council, and Minister of Intergovernmental Relations, return to order of the Assembly MR 1, asked for by hon. Ms Notley on November 18, 2024; return to order of the Assembly MR 13, asked for by Mr. Ellingson on November 18, 2024.

On behalf of hon. Mr. Sigurdson, Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation, return to order of the Assembly MR 4, asked for by Ms Sweet on November 18, 2024.

On behalf of hon. Mr. Dreeshen, Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors, return to orders of the Assembly MR 5 and MR 8, both asked for by Mr. Dach on November 18, 2024.

On behalf of hon. Mr. Jones, Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade, return to order of the Assembly MR 11, asked for by Ms Wright on November 18, 2024; return to order of the Assembly MR 15, asked for by MLA Batten on November 18, 2024.

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

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I get to the matter at hand, I would like to thank my friend and constituent Ed Vandenberg for joining us today. Ed grows the best dang potatoes out of Enchant, and I'm grateful for his presence here to watch government work.

### Point of Order Imputing Motives

**Mr. Schow:** I'd also like to rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker, on 23(h), (i), and (j). At the time noted, the opposition leader was asking a question to the government and during the question noted a bunch of lines that I thought were objectionable, but they were quoting an article from the *New York Times* so that it could not be attributed to the Leader of the Opposition. However, with my unofficial records, in the final line the leader said, "Why is the Premier threatening a national unity crisis," which I don't like, but whatever, "and encouraging separatism?"

Mr. Speaker, the Premier is not encouraging separatism. I don't believe that this is a matter of debate. I believe that she is attributing false motives to the Premier. The Premier absolutely supports Team Canada, and we would love if Team Canada would get on Team Alberta as well. I believe that this is a point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j).

**The Speaker:** The hon. Official Opposition House Leader, the Leader of the Opposition.

**Ms Gray:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is absolutely not a point of order. As I was the one speaking at the time, I feel like I have reasonably good recollection that what I said was "Why is the Premier threatening a national unity crisis and encouraging Alberta separatism to gain some sort of maple MAGA political advantage?" although for the record I think the clock might have cut me off a little bit, so your version might be slightly different. That is what I intended to say.

The reason this is not a point of order in any way, shape, or form is threefold, Mr. Speaker. First, we are in this place debating the record of the Premier and the work that she does on behalf of the province. We have had many different points of order, including on April 11 2024, where sometimes it feels like we are getting personal when really we are talking about government business and what the Premier is up to, and "the Premier's record is a matter of debate on which members will have a variety of opinions." That is quoting from your ruling on November 5, 2024.

Now, on the statement that I made, that the Premier is threatening a national unity crisis, I would draw to the Government House Leader's attention the Premier's own press release that she issued on March 20, 2025, after meeting with Prime Minister Mark Carney, which reads, "regardless of who that is, must address within the first six months of their term to avoid an unprecedented national unity crisis." Out of that meeting and that press release a number of news stories have been written about how the Premier has essentially threatened a national unity crisis if she does not get what she wants.

Secondly, the other portion of my comment was: encouraging Alberta separatism. Again, this is a matter of debate and a matter of debate that's being written about in many, many places, but allow me to quote from the *New York Times*, which I was asking my questions from. "[The Premier] has pledged to explore the idea of holding an independence referendum after [the] election and has threatened a rupture with the federal government to gain concessions." There are other quotations I can use from other sources, but this is all contained within. The Premier as the representative of our province has done both those things. It is a matter of debate whether the word "encouraging" perhaps might be offensive to the Government House Leader. I certainly don't believe it's a point of order.

3:00

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, I do have the benefit of the Blues, and I am prepared to rule. I can confirm that the hon. Opposition House Leader – the Blues, for the purposes of our discussion – said the following. “Why is the Premier threatening a national unity crisis and encouraging separation in some sort,” and then she proceeded. While the language is certainly provocative that has been used by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, I am of the opinion that, on this occasion, this is a dispute of the facts and not a point of order.

Having said that, just because something is a point of order or, conversely, is not a point of order today doesn’t necessarily mean it isn’t tomorrow, depending on the context in which it’s used, and I’m sure members will govern themselves accordingly. This isn’t a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Hon. members, at 2:04 the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction and the Deputy Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

### Point of Order Parliamentary Language

**Mr. Williams:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the time you specified, 2:04, the Minister of Justice and the keeper of the Great Seal was speaking. In the course of his answer to the question, the minister said, “the Premier has asked,” and continued on. At this point, there had been multiple interjections and heckles from members opposite, which is, of course, a normal part of debate in this Chamber. Increasingly, these heckles come with an accusatory tone in nature, and this one particularly from the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, which he had repeated multiple times throughout the answer, but this time timed it poorly, said “to cover up.” Immediately preceding that was the Minister of Justice saying “the Premier has asked,” so the implication is that the Premier has personally covered it up.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we remember on March 20, 2025, yourself on page 2615 of *Hansard* continued to rule on a very similar point of order, where you continued to say,

Today a member may have been specifically addressed for similar sorts of interjections. In particular, I’m very sympathetic to the Deputy Government House Leader’s position around implying that any member of the Assembly is corrupt rises to the level of a point of order.

Now, today it was not an interjection implying the word “corruption” particularly, though to cover up is a form of corruption. Today it was “cover up.”

Now, Mr. Speaker, multiple rulings in the past – I know not every time something’s a point of order continues to be, but this is particularly a reference to the Premier in her capacity of her work here in the Chamber. Speaker Kowalski cautioned on April 26, 2011, not to use the term “cover-up,” and then he continued on multiple other locations to rule that “cover-up” is unparliamentary: March 1, 1999; November 16, 1998; December 9, 1997; April 27, 2009; and then, continuing, “covering up the truth” on May 9 twice: May 9, 2011.

Now, of course, other Speakers also ruled “cover-up” as unparliamentary language when referring to an individual and asked for the withdrawal and apology: May 4, 1997, Speaker Schumacher; February 11, 1993, Speaker Schumacher; June 4, 1992, Deputy Speaker Schumacher; March 25, 1992, Acting Deputy Speaker Jonson; December 10, 1990, Speaker Schumacher. Mr. Speaker, there’s no doubt that “cover-up,” “covering up,” “covering up the truth,” or some variation of attempting to say that a particular member of this House is corrupt or is covering

something up is unparliamentary, and these heckles continue from members opposite. They try and time them when we reference we or the government.

This time the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall timed it to refer to the Premier in particular as the answer was being given from the Minister of Justice. I believe it is continuing to create disorder and a lack of decorum in this House. It definitely is imputing false motives and allegations against another member, and I ask the Speaker to continue with his ruling, to rule that this is out of order, unparliamentary, and will continue to cause disruption to the debate of the Chamber if members opposite insist on implying that individual members, never mind the Premier of this Chamber, are personally corrupt or personally covering things up.

**The Speaker:** The Opposition House Leader.

**Ms Gray:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, none of my members would ever imply that an individual member is corrupt or is covering things up. I disagree, though, with the Government House Leader on this. We have had two similar points of order in recent history. The Deputy Government House Leader quoted from one. This has been discussed on March 20 and on March 25. To reference the ruling that you only just made, Mr. Speaker, I realize that just because something is or isn’t a point of order in one context, that can change.

In today’s context I believe it’s very important to note that we are talking in this case about the Premier and the Premier’s record as leader of this province, again referencing November 5, 2024, when you made that similar distinction that when people are talking about a leader’s record, whether it be the opposition leader or the Premier, that is not speaking about an individual but rather about an important record and allowing us to have important debates in this place.

Certainly, the Deputy Government House Leader has suggested that this is creating disorder. I would suggest that it’s clear that the Deputy Government House Leader doesn’t like it. He is repeatedly calling points of order on it. I do not believe that it is creating disorder in this place because members interjecting while others are talking continues to be a standard practice, again, arguments that were made and considered under both March 20 and March 25.

In this case, Mr. Speaker, because we are talking about the Premier, because we are talking about the leader of our province and government policy, I would suggest that it is not a point of order, but I will look forward to your ruling and governing ourselves accordingly.

**The Speaker:** I do have the benefit of the Blues, and I am prepared to rule unless there are other submissions.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has a submission he’d like to make that’s substantive to the arguments.

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also wanted to say that I have not accused the Premier or any member of this Legislature in a personal capacity. I think the context was that there was a gag order e-mail sent to Health staff restricting their ability to directly talk to the Auditor General, and I do think that that’s a cover-up. People should be able to talk. It was in that context that I interjected, but I never accused the Premier or the Justice minister of doing something wrong personally.

**The Speaker:** While I appreciate the submission, it feels a little like continuing debate, but I appreciate you trying to clarify your intention in your use of an off-the-record remark.

With respect to the benefit of the Blues, sometimes our ability to focus on small details never ceases to amaze me. It seems to me that

the crux of the argument comes down to the precise time in which the hon. member made his off-the-record comment. With respect to the Blues it would appear that it says, “to avoid confusion, the Premier has asked and I’ve directed Justice officials,” and not that you ever see the Blues, but this is where it indicates the heckle took place, “To cover up,” which sounds like it is actually speaking to Justice officials, but it feels an awful lot like we’re splitting hairs more broadly.

While I’m not going to find this a point of order today, the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has been taking lessons from his good friend the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar in becoming a very persistent and consistent and relentless heckler. While I have a small place in my heart for such individuals, that place in my heart is shrinking by the day, so I encourage the member to perhaps be more responsive with respect to his volume and persistence because I note it, by the Deputy Government House Leader, that persistent use of such a heckle is likely to continue to create disorder given the fact that we’ve spent five or six minutes on this point of order. While I’m not finding it a point of order today, I think you can get the overall sense of the direction that I’m providing. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

Ordres du jour.

3:10

### Orders of the Day

#### Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

#### Bill 209 Reconciliation Implementation Act

[Debate adjourned April 7]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia has five minutes remaining should she choose to use it. It doesn’t appear that she would like to.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis has the call.

**Dr. Elmeligi:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. [some applause]

Oh, thank you. Thank you. Yes.

It is truly a pleasure and an honour to rise today to speak about my incredible support for Bill 209, the Reconciliation Implementation Act. I strongly encourage all members to support this bill.

Truth and reconciliation is something, Mr. Speaker, that really resonates with my heart, if I’m being honest. You know, there are other provinces that have passed reconciliation legislation because they recognize the critical importance of this issue right now in our society. Manitoba, Northwest Territories, and Nova Scotia all have reconciliation legislation, and Alberta should, too. As the MLA for Banff-Kananaskis I feel quite honoured to have two Indigenous reserves in my riding. The Tsuut’ina and the Iyârhe Nakoda continually teach me lessons every single day, and I’m truly grateful for each of them.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

As you would know, Banff-Kananaskis is on Treaty 7 lands, and I’m truly grateful for all of the stewards who came before me. And I don’t say that to be flippant. I say it truly from my heart to recognize that my riding and the place where I live, work, and play has been home to Indigenous people since time immemorial. Their relationship to that space and that land teaches me a stronger

reverence for that land every day, and I am incredibly grateful for that.

Truth and reconciliation for me always has two parts. First is truth, recognizing truly the atrocities of our past actions against our Indigenous brothers and sisters, but the reconciliation part is what this bill truly addresses. It’s like when I tell my daughter: apologies are great, but they need to come with action. I need to see a behaviour change. This is one of the values that I try to instill in my children, that words are words, but action is where the rubber hits the road, so to speak.

The reconciliation part of truth and reconciliation is what we really should be focusing on. Truth is critical, but reconciliation is where we demonstrate that we have learned from those past atrocities, that we have learned and that we are willing to move forward in very tangible ways. It helps us grow as a society, Madam Speaker, to recognize how reconciliation with our Indigenous brothers and sisters is an essential component of who Alberta is and who Canada is, who we are today and who we are going to become in the future.

I want to emphasize that reconciliation is not a chore, and we should not look at it as work. We should look at it as an opportunity to grow and learn and celebrate the diversity of our history and the diversity of the Indigenous stewards who came before us. It is actually so critical because around the world Indigenous people feel that they have been taken advantage of or harmed by colonization efforts. This isn’t unique to Alberta, but we have an opportunity to demonstrate leadership and commitment, to truly growing truth and reconciliation, and legislation is an important piece of that.

Reconciliation might be a word that we throw around, and I feel like sometimes in this Chamber and even outside of this Chamber we talk quite casually about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s calls for action; 94 calls for action, 81 remain unfulfilled. We throw these numbers around, Madam Speaker, but they actually come with very deep meaning, and we should think very carefully about how we talk about this issue.

Ultimately, we need to be able to measure success. That is how we actually demonstrate that we are doing reconciliation. We need to be able to measure that success, and then we need to be able to report back and share it with the people on what we did and how it’s making a difference. This bill does exactly that by requiring the minister to establish and maintain measures to advance reconciliation, consulting with First Nations on what those measures are and should be, developing an action plan and then implementing it so that it’s not just words on paper, and then reporting annually on that plan to ensure that plans and reports are translated into Indigenous languages.

All of these are critical components to reconciliation, and it’s a critical component, Madam Speaker, I would argue, in building the Alberta that we want to build for the future. We want to be a place that is welcoming and that is open and that celebrates its history, and this act helps us do exactly that. The Alberta government claims to have made progress on more than 20 calls to action, but without that reporting component, it’s hard to know how successful they’ve been.

One of the things that I continually hear from Indigenous elders and knowledge holders when I meet with them is that they want to influence the content of the support. They don’t want me to come into the room and say: here’s what I can do for you. They want me to come into the room and listen to them telling me what they need. The Reconciliation Implementation Act creates that framework where we go and speak with Indigenous communities and ask them: what actions would we need to do to demonstrate our commitment to reconciliation? It is that Indigenous-led perspective, Madam

Speaker, that is so critical in truly making reparations with Indigenous communities.

Right now the government will say: we have the Aboriginal consultation office and we do consultation. That is true; however, that doesn't mean that it is effective or that it couldn't be better. We can always do better, Madam Speaker, and when it comes to truth and reconciliation, we should always be striving to do better because this work will never be done. This work is about building positive, trusting relationships with our Indigenous brothers and sisters, and that work, in my mind, is never done. Just like how I will never stop being a mom. I will always be a mom to my girls, no matter how old they are or how many babies they have of their own. That will always be my job. Similarly, when it comes to truth and reconciliation, the work is never done because we can always build on those relationships.

Right now the Aboriginal consultation office – I have been told in meetings with Blackfoot and Iyârhe Nakoda nations that it feels like a box-ticking exercise, so it doesn't feel genuine and authentic. I've also been told when talking with the Blackfoot and the Iyârhe Nakoda about logging in west Bragg Creek and in the Highwood Pass that they weren't offered site visits, that they're never offered sufficient site visits for logging in particular, which takes up a large footprint on the landscape. It's not that they don't want logging to happen, Madam Speaker. They would like to be able to go and assess potential cut blocks to see if there are burial sites or vision quest sites or sites of significance, but they're not given that opportunity because site visits are expensive and they're never given sufficient funding or capacity to do that work.

We also know that we have inadequate reporting and timelines through the Aboriginal consultation office. A big part of that is because there's a lot of demand on First Nations to consult but not necessarily the capacity to match that. Part of reconciliation is creating the opportunity to build those relationships but then also supporting our Indigenous friends and neighbours to participate adequately and for them to say when they feel that participation is adequate.

The Reconciliation Implementation Act goes a level higher than just site visits and things like that, Madam Speaker. It goes to the level of the legislation. It is a much more overarching piece that will effectively ensure that First Nations are consulted on pieces of legislation, not just development proposals. It will also ensure that the government is committed to delivering reconciliation programs and reporting on the success of those programs.

3:20

We need to be much more fulsome in our approach to reconciliation, Madam Speaker. We need to consult more effectively, and we need to consider that consultation from the creation of legislation all the way through to something being built on the land. The reality is that our Indigenous brothers and sisters have, due to colonization . . . [Dr. Elméligi's speaking time expired] Darn.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

**Member Tejada:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my honour to rise in support of Bill 209, drafted by my brilliant colleague from Edmonton-West Henday. Upon reading more about this bill, I'm reminded of the phrase, "Actions speak louder than words," and I think that really speaks to the overarching goal of this bill in terms of the actions that our Alberta government can take on reconciliation. What Bill 209 does is that it compels the government to take action on reconciliation in a transparent and measurable way. What this bill does is that it gives the government, really, the

opportunity, and I appreciate the comments from my colleague previously around looking at reconciliation as an opportunity. I think that is what this bill does.

I want to also recognize that in this House, having grown up in Alberta, in Treaty 7 and looking around the community that I lived in, the schools, the jobs that I've held, always seeing the many missing pieces when it comes to consultation with Indigenous folks, inclusion of Indigenous folks in all of the decisions that are made at different levels of government, one of the things that really has struck me in the last few years is that we have made a little bit of progress. One of the things that I would note namely is the weekly land acknowledgements, though I do wish that we would do them daily. I appreciate that that work was done by our Indigenous colleagues here previously on both sides of the aisle and the enormous respect that I have for our Indigenous colleagues here and how necessary it was for them to bring their voices into these discussions in order to get that done. While I'm glad that we finally got here, I'm sad that it took us so long, that it didn't happen until 2023.

In saying this, I recognize that there is so much more work to be done, and we need the TRC calls to action to guide us in that work. That is a little bit of a preface on what I'll be focusing on here. I think there are so many areas that the TRC calls to action address, and I think what stands out for me is that we are looking at 94 calls to action – these were drafted quite some time ago – and 81 remain unfulfilled, and zero were completed in 2023.

What I think that this legislation will do is create accountability. When I hear talk from the other side quite consistently in terms of opportunity, in terms of investments and prosperity, what I feel is that there's a little bit of seasoning with everything I hear from the other side, throwing in the word "Indigenous" but not really doing meaningful consultation and then looking further, and I appreciate the education that I've received from my colleague from Edmonton-West Henday, in terms of what consultation actually means and that it is a legal duty. When we're talking about consultation, there is the duty to consult, and that should be the framework and the backbone of everything that we do in government across ministries.

When I look at this bill, I know that the aim is to establish and maintain measures designed to advance reconciliation in the delivery of programs and services administered by the government, to ensure that Executive Council advances reconciliation, to develop and publish consultations with Indigenous Relations as part of truth and reconciliation, to consult at all levels of government on what the action plan is, and to do annual reports. While I have appreciated some of the documentation that's come out of Indigenous Relations in terms of things like the road map for missing and murdered Indigenous women, there are several references there to – basically, a lot of references have been left out in recent years around national action plans. I recognize that there's an agenda to move away from our co-operation with all partners in terms of reconciliation and even the way that we talk about things like truth and reconciliation, so I would like us to implement the national action plan and to actually have that be part of this work as well.

One of the other goals of this bill is that each Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta has the duty to consult with Indigenous nations when they're introducing any legislation that will impact Indigenous communities, and that is something I haven't seen so far. Just to think of recent examples of this, I think the most egregious would be the red tape reduction bill, Bill 38. When I think about the fact that Bill 38 rolled reporting on the deaths of children, including Indigenous children, who are overrepresented in care, who are, like, the most vulnerable part of

our society, when I think about Bill 38 and the fact that it actually compelled the government to stop reporting on the deaths of kids who have been in care from 18 to 24 and that such a large percentage of Indigenous kids are represented in kids in care and are at risk of homelessness, of violent victimization – to see just the cynicism, that that bill was rolled into red tape makes me think: okay; well, that's a bill where Bill 209 as a guiding principle across ministries would have been useful.

When it comes to education, which is also part of the TRC, we recently had reports from Indigenous elders. This was in 2021, but there is an article that is linked to this particular story. Indigenous leaders and elders felt that they were used by the Alberta government in order to bolster a new education curriculum, which did not properly cover reconciliation and didn't meet the goals of the TRC calls to action.

When it comes to health, any bills around health, any decisions that are made by government around health, you know, now what we're seeing is part of a pattern of firings of folks who might speak out or who might not toe the line in terms of what this government's aims are. When they fired Deena Hinshaw, Esther Tailfeathers, a respected elder, educator, and doctor, had to step down because she felt that this would impact Indigenous health negatively.

Even more recently in some of the, frankly, gobsmacking headlines that we've been hearing around access to justice, the Alberta Law Foundation board members quitting over their recent decisions to basically cut funding to legal aid. Also, within that were the decisions to stall the Indigenous institute for law.

When it comes to coal, as recently as January of this year Chief Adam North Peigan talking about the lifting of the coal moratorium. I'm thinking these are just a sampling of examples, I guess, where having a bill on reconciliation could have made a difference here. I say this because this should be nonpartisan. What I've heard a lot from the other side is a lot of self-congratulation. When I remember my time, actually, even just sitting in estimates the year previous to this one, when we're talking about monuments, when we're talking about reconciliation gardens – I think these are all worthy, but we need to do more.

3:30

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

**Member Ceci:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to address private member's Bill 209, that we're here talking about. I'm supportive of this private member's bill. It was brought forward, as you know, looking at the title, by Member Arcand-Paul. Member Arcand-Paul is a . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but proper names are not appropriate in this Chamber even if you're reading it off the member's bill.

**Member Ceci:** Thank you. [interjections] I don't know. What is it? Edmonton-West Henday is the riding of the member who brought forward this bill. His name is written right there. The member is a young lawyer who is a member of the Alexander First Nation. I said his name there.

Of course, the member brought this forward because he knows from where he speaks. He believes there is a need for this information to come forward, and you can see that it's written in very lawyerly language, Madam Speaker. With the assistance of Legislative Counsel we've got a rather complete private member's bill, and some of the reasons – I'll just share that when the member brought forward this bill on November I think it was 4, 2024, he said that Indigenous peoples are increasingly unhoused, incarcerated, or within the child welfare system, and he said: a

government that cares about all Indigenous peoples and is intent on reconciliation should work to fix these issues because Indigenous peoples in this province deserve better. I couldn't agree more. He went on to say about Bill 209 that reconciliation is about building trust and fostering respectful relationships, which requires concrete actions rather than just rhetoric. The member said: the government must do better and address its inaction and lack of inclusion of Indigenous leadership in decision-making.

I want to expand on some of the things that the member talked about in those two quotes because it is fact that Indigenous peoples, First Nation peoples, and Métis peoples are systematically blocked, culturally left out, not accommodated by dominant society. Unfortunately and regrettably, that has affected the health, the educational achievements, the judicial dispositions, the personal incomes, and other lived experiences and life outcomes of Indigenous, First Nations, Métis individuals and has left them incredibly challenged. These are both personal challenges these individuals face, and they are group or societal challenges.

That led directly to the truth and reconciliation sessions that went across this country and addressed hundreds and hundreds and hundreds – probably thousands would be a better way of saying this – of individuals who came to those sessions and were listened to by the commissioners. I personally attended in my role as a policy manager for Momentum Community Economic Development in the years between 2011 and 2014. I personally attended sessions in Calgary that were held as the commissioners were coming across the country, and I can tell you that they listened intently to those individuals who came forward and expressed the most hurtful experiences, both present and past, that they have gone through. Of course, those individuals were supported by many, many people who were with them, but they weren't all elders who were speaking to the commission. There were many, many younger people who wanted to give witness and talk about what they believed society needs to do to address, redress the harm that has come to Indigenous, First Nations, and Métis people over time.

That's what this Reconciliation Implementation Act, Bill 209, that the member has brought forward is all about. I'll spend a few minutes looking at the four purposes that are here.

- (a) to hold the Government accountable for its responsibilities in respect of reconciliation by requiring it to commit to the following . . .

This is where the rubber hits the road, Madam Speaker. That's in the first point.

- (i) advancing reconciliation through the delivery of its programs and services . . .

That government should advance reconciliation through the delivery of its programs and services. And how do you do that? Well, you do that in concert with First Nations, Métis, and Indigenous peoples. To ensure that direction is being followed, (ii), which is under the purposes section, 2, talks about

- (ii) ensuring that all Government decisions are made in accordance with reconciliation principles . . .

Those principles are identified further down in this private member's bill under 4.

As I said, it looks like a young lawyer and Legislative Counsel have clearly understood how to walk through this because the next one talks about accountability for ensuring that directions are followed, the directions that would look at the programs and services advancing reconciliation, and that is:

- (iii) transparently acting on the Calls to Action by establishing and reporting on specific measures implemented in respect of those actions, and . . .

A further check and balance and accountability is listed under the last purpose:

- (b) to ensure that meaningful and honourable consultation, guided by decisions of the Supreme Court of Canada, is conducted before the enactment of proposed legislation of general application.

I truly believe that if we were to support this bill, we would advance the programs and services in this province for all peoples in the province. And why do I say all peoples? Because the whole Truth and Reconciliation Commission was about trying to understand where the shortcomings in our society are with regard to the needs of First Nations, Métis, and Indigenous peoples. There were 94 shortcomings identified, and if people believe that Alberta has addressed those 94 calls to action, that's one thing, but I don't think it's credible to say that we have. I think what's more credible is to suggest that not enough has been done.

When the Alberta NDP was the government, between 2015 and 2019, there was a serious attempt made to address parts of what we knew was going to be happening with regard to truth and reconciliation, the suggestions, and the calls to action. One of them was to ensure that all First Nations within Alberta, all reserves, all reservations within Alberta had fresh, clean drinking water. We've heard far too much about First Nation communities and reserves throughout Canada not having access to drinking water. So \$100 million was put in the budget to bring it up to the boundaries of First Nation reserves throughout Alberta, and the hope was that the federal government would take it the rest of the way to points within the reserve that were common to all individuals and easily accessible to people who lived on those reserves. That was action started under the government of the day, and I'm pleased to say that the subsequent government in 2019 followed that up.

3:40

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

**Member Miyashiro:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm going to speak in favour of this bill from our Member for Edmonton-West Heday, and I'll reference some things that I actually said earlier today in the House about the children's services system and kids that have passed away.

Madam Speaker, I'm going to support this bill because I worked in the child welfare system for over 13 years in southern Alberta. In fact, I ran an adolescent treatment centre on the Blood reserve; started it from scratch, developed the program, hired all the staff. Because of that work I was given a Blackfoot name, Aakaoko'si, which means many children, and I take that honorific very seriously. What that means for me is that I have a responsibility to the Blackfoot children and to the Blackfoot people of southern Alberta for giving me the honorific to make sure that things are done in the way that they need to be done to support the Blackfoot people in southern Alberta.

One thing that happened while I was on city council was that we were the first municipality in Canada to pass a reconciliation implementation plan. That was way back in 2017, and this plan covered all the points in the truth and reconciliation guide. We also developed a vision statement, which really lays the groundwork for what the city of Lethbridge needed to do to work through this plan.

The City of Lethbridge values inclusion, equity and diversity in our community and is committed to becoming a community of reconciliation with our Indigenous population on Blackfoot lands and working in partnership with the Lethbridge Indigenous Sharing Network, the Kainai Nation and the Piikani Nation.

This has carried through to the present, Madam Speaker, and because of that effort – I just want to read one thing. The city of Lethbridge and the Kainai Blood Tribe share an eight-kilometre border. What we've done in southern Alberta is that we created a memorandum of respect, understanding, and partnership, which

identifies a number of areas of mutual interest and concern to both communities, and then created structures on how those parties are going to work better together. Stronger communication and shared understanding help us to better understand and reflect the needs of Blackfoot and other Indigenous peoples in our plans, policies, programs, and services. This couldn't have happened without having us implement the reconciliation plan before that.

One thing that also carries through with the implementation plan is – there's a quote from the late Murray Sinclair, who was the chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: our leaders need to show the way, but no matter how many deals and agreements they make, it is in our daily conversations and interactions that our success as a nation in forging a better place will ultimately be measured. These are the interactions that we're talking about today, the small things that happen, not just the big things. It's: how are we going to create services and supports that honour Jordan's principle? How are we going to look at equity and inclusion in the different things that we do in our provinces, in our federal government, and municipally? How are we going to work with our neighbours on the First Nations to make sure that they have a voice in the things that happen in our communities?

You know, one of the things that really struck me when we created that plan was the wide variety of people that we talked to in Lethbridge and southern Alberta and the wide variety of people that actually had input into developing this plan. When we talk about reconciliation, it can't be just words. I think what this bill does is that it lays it out for us, that we really need to do excessive consultation and we need to listen to people. We also need to develop a plan that is achievable and develop a plan that the province can implement. It's only after having those discussions with the people that are important and are stakeholders in this planning, to make sure that they're heard and to make sure that their needs are met.

A lot of the things that were in our plan – because it was municipal we had to advocate for the federal and provincial governments to do their part. We had to call on the federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments everywhere to fully adopt things like the United Nations declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples as part of their framework for reconciliation. We had to make sure that our city manager and the administration were doing the right kind of education and awareness on UNDRIP and discussion on how the municipality can support that. We had to call upon things like the federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments to repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous peoples and lands. That was a big discussion to make sure that we were saying that not just are we going to uphold the reconciliation part but that we need to face the truth part. We need to ensure that the province and the feds and other levels of government are going to talk the talk and they're going to make sure that any falsehoods that have been propagated over the years will be corrected and that we can set that argument straight.

We also need to look at how we work with partnering jurisdictions like Lethbridge county. How do we work with them to make sure that we're working together to uphold the things that the traditional Blackfoot people hold dear and the things that we can work towards? A big deal, too, and this could happen in any municipality, is that all the municipal planning instruments that we use, things like area structure plans and outline plans, all of the ones prepared by the city of Lethbridge, need to conduct a traditional knowledge and land-use study at the outset of the project. I was part of that, part of the municipal planning commission where we actually went out and looked at a piece of land that someone wanted to develop. One of the elders spoke about that land, what it meant.

We had to understand how that was going to be implemented in the planning process.

One of the big things that we talked about, too, especially about children's services issues was: how do we encourage the federal government in what their jurisdiction is in family and children's services, and how do we get our position across to them on the need for equity and diversity?

When I started in the child welfare system, kids that spoke Blackfoot were admonished and sometimes punished for speaking Blackfoot. By the time I left the child welfare system and was running the centre on the Blood reserve, we were teaching the kids about how to speak Blackfoot. We had a ceremonial room where elders came in and did ceremonies, and we had kids finding sweetgrass in the river valley, and people were burning sage. That was the biggest difference, and just that little, small microcosm of what we're talking about here is how we can make a big turnaround and have an understanding of what that means to Indigenous people, especially Blackfoot people in my area. When they understand how we're going to uphold their traditions and how we're going to support them in their culture, that led to the success, I believe, of the service that we were providing.

We really need, Madam Speaker, to look at health as a big issue, too. That's one of the other things in the truth and reconciliation recommendations. How do we increase the number of Indigenous health care providers? How do we ensure the retention of Indigenous health care providers in Indigenous communities? I think my colleague touched on that a little bit.

Well, part of that is that perhaps they need to be supported better. Perhaps that means that other people that work in health care need to have some cultural competence training. Maybe they need to understand more about maybe what some of the differences are between traditional Indigenous practices and beliefs and customs versus what they're doing now.

You know, we really need to look at how the justice system works. Here's a really big thing. We can say with a lot of confidence, as we can say in the children's services system, that the Indigenous population is grossly overrepresented, has been forever, has been because it's our system and not theirs. The corrections system as well and justice system have been grossly overrepresented by people from Indigenous communities.

3:50

You know, back in the '90s, we started working a lot on how to deal with FASD and how to prevent FASD. You know, really, that's one of the things that is a community-wide effort. We talked about that in southern Alberta a lot, and that whole saying that it takes a whole community to raise a child.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

**Mr. Kasawski:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would be happy to rise to speak to the Member for Edmonton-West Henday's private member's bill, Bill 209, Reconciliation Implementation Act. Very happy that this is being brought forward. In my own community of Sherwood Park, in Strathcona county, you know, in 2021, in order to respond to the calls for reconciliation, they created an Indigenous council to advise the municipal council on its decisions and ways to better integrate decision-making with the Indigenous lens. I think that's an important thing, which is what this bill is trying to do.

I know that Strathcona county is not the only municipality. As the member for Lethbridge-West pointed out, Lethbridge is already ahead on this. Municipalities are leading the way on this, and Bill 209 is looking for a way to just catch up the province to work that's already being done by municipalities and other organizations across

Alberta, so it's a very good bill. Some highlights of it that are important to bring forward: there are over 250,000 Indigenous Albertans, and I think it's almost over 130,000 Métis people as well. This is a large portion of the population, Madam Speaker. I know that we work to serve all Albertans.

Too much we see a self-serving agenda by this government, like we're seeing with the issue with the Auditor General and the issue to block staff from talking to the Auditor General. In a self-serving way, the government is blocking staff from talking to them. We need to serve Albertans, and Bill 209 is the kind of legislation we want to bring forward into this place, because it serves Albertans, a large portion of Albertans. Rather than championing Alberta, though, we seem to find that the UCP only does want to serve their own agenda even when it undermines the trust Albertans have in this government.

I'm happy to have Bill 209 in front of us because here we have an opportunity to answer some of the calls of reconciliation. It's been brought to my attention that of the 94 calls of reconciliation, we've still got 81 left to address. A bill that changes the government's approach to decision-making and making sure that we're bringing forward a lens, an Indigenous perspective, on government decision-making is actually just catching us up to where most of our province is. This is almost an update to get us to where we should be because Albertans have embraced reconciliation. We know we have a history that isn't one that we're all incredibly proud of, but we are taking it on, and by taking on and addressing it, we're going to be a better province going forward.

One of the lessons I've learned, Madam Speaker, that I'm taking to heart and I have brought into my daily life now – and let's just back up. I'm just a kid that grew up in Sherwood Park in Strathcona county. Strathcona county actually doesn't have any reserves in it or adjacent to it. We don't border any, so you grew up with your perspective. But the perspective that I now realize: we are all treaty people. Madam Speaker, when I see Bill 209 come forward and raise up that reality that we're all treaty people, it makes me proud. Even before there was a province, there were treaties signed.

I want to take a moment, Madam Speaker, to read into the record if I can a really great article on how to be a better treaty person. It was written by Amei-lee Laboucan. Just for *Hansard*, that's A-M-E-I hyphen L-E-E, so we won't have to correct that later on. Amei-lee Laboucan wrote a great article on how to be a better treaty person.

Learning to live with each other in a good way, in kinship – respecting relationships with each other and with non-human relations – means respecting Indigenous people and their rights to self-determination and territorial title . . .

“When we talk about nations, then we're not just talking about a single community. We're talking about the wider political existence of many communities that share a particular culture and a particular history . . . Indigenous Peoples should be able to discuss with their treaty partners, the Canadian state, the issues that arise instead of the way Canadian courts narrowly construe things such as duty to consult.”

Treaty agreements weren't meant to be static . . . Rather, they were widely believed to be living documents, something to be revisited over time as [the] world changes.

Well, we are certainly going through a changing world right now, Madam Speaker. It seems like an appropriate time to consider our role as treaty people. People who are living on these lands need to understand, renew, and insist on having better relationships with one another. I really do believe that we can do that through renewal of treaties with Indigenous people because treaty-making is for the mutual benefit of all Albertans. Our treaty ancestors negotiated for the tools and frameworks for us to be able to live in an ethical and equitable way with each other and our human relations and

nonhuman relations. Now it's up to us to learn these tools and implement them.

Bill 209 is bringing forward a tool that will allow us to be better with our relations. It's a beautiful way to approach our government. We have a history of at times not being as welcoming of our relations, and now we have this opportunity. It's going to require annual reporting on reconciliation progress that must be made public and translated into Indigenous languages. I understand the UCP are allergic to accountability and we're asking to bring a bill forward that is going to require accountability, so if the other side speaks against this legislation, it tracks. We should be accountable, and we should be held accountable, and we should be transparent, so requiring annual reporting on reconciliation progress and making it public would be of value to Albertans, and then translating that into Indigenous languages: also of value. We need to be able to bring all Albertans into our understanding of their government and how we are working for them.

It's going to require a duty to consult of MLAs when we introduce legislation that affects Indigenous people and legislation that relates to the TRC calls to action. This duty to consult, requiring it of the government: this is a natural step forward. As we're learning from the treaties that were written and the origin that we have that we are treaty people, knowing how to be better treaty people is a valuable thing, and I'm glad that 209 is requiring that of us.

Lastly, and also I think maybe most importantly, is that within the government, within Executive Council, so cabinet and the Premier, they must consider reconciliation principles in all decisions. These lenses that we look at policy- and decision-making through are important. We have heard in this Legislature how important it is to bring more women to the chairs, to fill the Assembly so that we get more perspectives and have more identities. We're so proud on this side of the Legislature of not only the Indigenous members that we have but the members we have from so many communities. They bring that lens of their lived experience forward when they're looking at legislation, and it makes them better legislators.

4:00

It's going back to the fact that in our history we are treaty people. Before this province was even formed, there was a treaty made here, which is a part of our history, which makes it why as Albertans we stick together and we work together in good times and in bad. It's probably why we love a sport like hockey and why so widely across this country everybody is ready to get their elbows up when dealing with the United States. It's because of our relation and our history with treaty. This is an important part of our history that makes us who we are and, frankly, makes us ready to fight foreign powers that are trying to subordinate us and take over our country.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any others who wish to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my honour, it's my privilege to rise to speak to Bill 209. I want to thank my colleague from Edmonton-West Henday for bringing forward such a thoughtful piece of legislation. As you may know, prior to running for public office, I was working with a boutique law firm that was focusing on treaty land claims and Indian residential school claims. I had some opportunity to learn about Indigenous law, learn about the history of colonization, history of treaties, importance of treaties, and the claims that still remain outstanding from those treaty obligations. Those treaties are the reason that we are all here in this province, in this country. Those are the documents that were

between nation to nation, documents that were the reason that people could come here, live here a life of opportunity and prosperity. For many of us I think coming here has been nothing but an opportunity to live a life of dignity, to live a life of opportunity, pursue education, and, essentially, be who we want to be.

But when we look at the history, when we look at the claims that are still coming out of treaties, we see that there's a whole other chapter of our history that we are not so proud of, and we need to reconcile that. More recently I think the Truth and Reconciliation Commission went over that, consulted with Indigenous communities from coast to coast to coast and came up with calls to action. There was a reason that they were called calls to action and not recommendations. It was expected when government is engaging in such an exercise, giving hope to Indigenous communities, that they are listening. There was expectation that government would act on those calls to action as well.

Unfortunately, most of those calls remain just on the books. Even Alberta still has to make an amendment to its statute of limitations, which requires that historical claims, treaty claims should be able to come forward without any restriction of limitation on those claims. It's call to action 26. That's just a simple amendment that the government could do even tomorrow to send some message that they are taking these calls to action seriously. But, again, here we are. In 2025 we are debating a bill that just simply is asking that there needs to be some commitment from the government towards consultation. So far the government only has a policy document that is not adequate, and we have seen over and over that that document lacks in many respects and has been scrutinized by the courts as well.

The second thing that the bill does is provide a framework for reconciliation and calls to action implementation. I indicated one. There are so many other calls to action that are within the purview of the province, but so far we have not seen any progress on this. Our government doesn't really track progress on these things.

The third thing is that, again, the member has gone to various First Nations, treaty nations, consulted with them. Based on those consultations, this bill is providing a framework legislation. There is a lot more room. If the government wants to build upon this, improve upon this bill, they could certainly do that. It's not very restrictive as it's drafted. It's just setting a framework for government to take consultation seriously, send a message to Indigenous communities that government is serious about consultation. Consultation is not something that we can ignore. It's a constitutional obligation. Section 35 recognizes Indigenous rights in treaties and raises them to the constitutional level, and courts in many cases have expanded upon, explained what consultation needs to look like.

This government always claims that they are the business-friendly government. If they seriously think about that, many of their failures in the past, Conservative governments here and Conservative governments federally, on major projects such as Energy East and many other projects were because these Conservative governments did not take consultations seriously. In 2014 there was a decision with respect to the Gateway pipeline, and that decision essentially was saying, in a nutshell, that the government didn't have a consultation plan. The government could not just rely on the National Energy Board to do all that. The government needed to take that seriously, take that as a constitutional and fiduciary duty that is owed to Indigenous communities and do the consultation properly. When we look at this Kinder Morgan pipeline, that pipeline got delayed many times, and the last delay was specifically because the government was sent back to the drawing board to do more consultations.



I think that if the government wants to provide certainty to businesses, wants to create certainty for big projects, they will have to take Indigenous rights seriously, they will have to take treaty obligations seriously, and they will have to take consultation seriously. This is an opportunity for the government, when the member has already done the work, to take that work, put that into the law, and send that message out to Indigenous communities that they respect their rights, they respect their treaties and send a message to businesses as well that they will not repeat the mistakes that they have been doing in the past. They will take consultation seriously. They will engage with Indigenous communities in a meaningful way and create certainty for Indigenous communities as well as businesses.

One last thing I want to mention. The government can take this as a first step, as I said. The government has a lot more resources than a private member could have, and the government can use those resources. The government can use the expertise that we have on this side, and we are here to work with the government on this bill. The government can engage more broadly with Indigenous communities across this province. The government could engage more broadly with the businesses on what they need in terms of Indigenous consultations, what they need to do. The government can provide a real framework that will be written in law that will provide some clarity on the obligations that government has, businesses have and will help us achieve reconciliation as well as help us at least move towards reconciliation. I don't think this bill alone will do that, but at least it's a good first step towards that, walking towards that path of reconciliation.

4:10

Again, I urge all members of this House to rise above the party lines. This is not a partisan issue. This is everyone's collective responsibility as treaty people, to uphold your side of the bargain. When Indigenous people entered into these treaties, they made good-faith bargains with the Crown, and now it's the obligation of us as the members of this Legislature, us as treaty people to uphold our side of the bargain, to uphold the Crown's fiduciary obligations, the Crown's obligation towards consultation.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there any other members wishing to join the debate? There are six minutes before we will move to the mover of the bill to close debate. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

**Mr. Dach:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Here we are once again discussing reconciliation in the province of Alberta, something that the province likes to boast about and points to its record, but I'm hardly thinking it's a record one would be entirely proud of. If indeed they were doing their work and were indeed following through on their claims that reconciliation requirements have been met, we wouldn't be needing Bill 209, that's been brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-West Henday, the Reconciliation Implementation Act.

A simple review, Madam Speaker, of the government's own policies with respect to reconciliation and Indigenous consultations in Alberta reveals some very interesting wording when they're attempting to rationalize how Indigenous consultation takes place in this province and what the actual responsibilities are and how they kind of skate around the duties. They do state in an overview of the government's Indigenous consultations in Alberta that

Alberta's management and development of provincial Crown lands and natural resources is subject to its legal and constitutional duty to consult First Nations and, where appropriate, accommodate their interests when Crown decisions

may adversely [affect] their continued [use and] exercise of constitutionally protected Treaty rights.

However, one goes further on to read in this same piece of government policy under Alberta consultation policies and guidelines, where it also says:

We have amended The Government of Alberta's Policy on Consultation with First Nations on Land and Natural Resource Management, 2013 and The Government of Alberta's Policy on Consultation with Metis Settlements on Land and Natural Resource Management, 2015. The amendment is an aspirational statement added to the preamble of each policy.

Now, that's a telling remark, isn't it? The amendment is an aspirational statement. In other words, it's something we hope to achieve sometime, maybe, if we ever get around to it. It's there in black and white for you to read because that's where we're headed for. That's the road we'd like to go down. But there's no actual intention to make it the true goal and destination of this government to fully implement truth and reconciliation and make it a direction to every government department from every minister that truth and reconciliation is something that has to be done, that will be done and if it's not, there are going to be repercussions from the leadership of the government of the day. That struck me like a lead balloon when I read those words about the amendments being an aspirational statement added to the preamble of each policy.

As we know, the government has fallen behind other provinces in reconciliation efforts. Under this particular UCP government we don't have a reconciliation strategy despite having over 258,000 Indigenous people in our population in Alberta, and this is totally unacceptable in 2025. The government has to do better, and we say that directly by bringing forward Bill 209, Reconciliation Implementation Act. Saying that this is the guideline, this is the pathway forward that the government should already be implementing and enforcing amongst its ministries is not an aspirational statement, Madam Speaker; it is actually hard-and-fast dictatum to government departments and ministries that this policy must be adhered to, the framework has to be implemented in a very respectful and truthful and concrete way.

Now, Bill 209 creates Alberta's first comprehensive reconciliation framework. Unlike what the government attempts to do in its rationale and its weak attempts at claiming to adhere to reconciliation in its decision-making and consultation process, Bill 209 will establish clear – absolutely clear – ministerial responsibilities for advancing reconciliation through government programs and services. And the language here is important, Madam Speaker. The language that is in the bill states that the minister must develop – must develop – and maintain. It's not an aspirational statement. It's a dictatum to the minister saying that the minister must develop and maintain specific measures designed to implement reconciliation principles across government.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but we are now at the time where the sponsor of the private member's bill will close debate.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

**Member Arcand-Paul:** Nanaskamon, Madam Speaker. I'd like to thank the members who have spoken to their support of this bill, including my relative the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford for her heartfelt remarks about the need for Bill 209, but also to every single one of the members on this side of the House who has stood in support for this bill. Regardless of how the vote goes today, which – given the minister's speaking notes at the beginning of second reading, I already anticipate the UCP to vote against Bill 209, the Reconciliation Implementation Act, which is concerning to me as a Nehiyaw.

I was hopeful that this bill might have been passed by the UCP because of the work done with leaders and knowledge keepers to get this bill drafted, the first time in this province's history. Instead, we are going to see that the UCP does not want to commit to the hard work of reconciliation in this province. For example, while the number of Indigenous children in care continues to rise, with the majority of those who die in the government's care having been Indigenous, they have recently been treated as red tape by this government.

Madam Speaker, with Bill 38 alone, if the Reconciliation Implementation Act was law, this cabinet would have caught this egregious and offensive oversight in their legislation. But, alas, this government still muses that it has completed 24 of the 29 provincial calls to action. Well, in each assessment that I've done of the calls to action, I've noted that this government has not completed all of the calls to action in full, and partial fulfillment is not fulfilling a call to action. We must do better. Treaty requires it.

I'm also seriously concerned that this government is not interested in the repudiation of the legal concepts like terra nullius or the doctrine of discovery, which is necessary for reconciliation to move forward in this country. We just saw the other day political meddling with the legal institute of the Wahkohtowin Law and Governance Lodge, whose own objectives were to uphold and help build Indigenous justice systems within Indigenous nations here in Alberta. Madam Speaker, this does not look like reconciliation to me.

Members opposite have also raised their concern about reconciliation without even knowing it by sending letters to the Minister of Indigenous Relations with concerns about Jordan's principle. Jordan's principle was not being carried out by this government, which has prejudiced Indigenous students in Alberta. Well, Madam Speaker, this is a clear example that TRC calls to action are not being completed.

4:20

The NDP under Premier Notley signed the very first memorandum of understanding in this country between the province, First Nations, and the federal government. Sadly, since the UCP took office, all of the good work that the NDP did to honour the sacred relationship between the Crown and Indigenous peoples in this province has fallen to the wayside. This includes in the very area that members opposite wrote to the minister, over Jordan's principle. This principle exists to prevent the exact obfuscation that this government has created when it has a responsibility under this principle to support Indigenous students in this province. Sadly, this government shirks its responsibilities, but I promise you this act would remedy any potential oversights that you might unknowingly do.

I urge the other side to seriously consider the relationship that they want with their constituents. Many of them have Indigenous nations within their riding, and to support reconciliation means to fully support your constituents. This is why the Reconciliation Implementation Act is necessary now, because Indigenous peoples in Alberta deserve respect. The treaties deserve respect. Each step forward together strengthens our relationships and builds a more just future for all of our peoples.

I'd like to end my remarks with a statement from the late justice and Senator Murray Sinclair.

Achieving reconciliation is like climbing a mountain – we must proceed a step at a time. It will not always be easy. There will be storms, there will be obstacles, but we cannot allow ourselves to be daunted by the task because our goal is just and it is also necessary.

Remember, reconciliation is yours to achieve. We owe it to each other to build a Canada based on our shared future, a future of healing and trust.

I urge all members of this Assembly to pass Bill 209, the Reconciliation Implementation Act, and commit to reconciliation. My neechies this was for you to show Alberta and Canada what a world we could have.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday has moved second reading of Bill 209, Reconciliation Implementation Act.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:22 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Arcand-Paul	Elmeligi	Kasawski
Brar	Goehring	Miyashiro
Ceci	Gray	Renaud
Chapman	Haji	Sabir
Dach	Hoffman	Tejada
Eggen	Ip	Wright, P.

Against the motion:

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

Totals: For – 18 Against – 44

[Motion for second reading of Bill 209 lost]

4:40

### **Bill 210 Employment Standards (Protecting Workers' Tips) Amendment Act, 2024**

**Ms Gray:** Mr. Speaker, tips and gratuities should belong to the employees. It is an honour to rise and move second reading of Bill 210, Employment Standards (Protecting Workers' Tips) Amendment Act, 2024, to have Alberta join the now seven other provinces in Canada that recognize that tips and gratuities should belong to the employees and make it such that they are regulated by employment standards and protected.

Mr. Speaker, in our current state of an affordability crisis, where the costs for everything continue to rise, where we see a lack of action from this government when it comes to issues of affordability, when we see a minimum wage that has been frozen at \$15 per hour for more than six years now, having an employment standards update that brings Alberta in line with other jurisdictions,

protecting tips not only makes sense, but it meets what both employees and consumers are looking for.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Now, my Bill 210 was drafted with the help of Parliamentary Counsel – and a big thank you to the drafters who put this together – and was drafted to mirror legislation that works in other provinces, specifically leaning in on Ontario’s version of this employment standards change. Fun fact, Mr. Speaker: the Ontario version of these changes was actually done in that province as a private member’s bill. Now, it was not first time is the charm. It was a private member’s bill that was introduced multiple times before it was adopted, but when it was adopted, it received all-party support as well as support from business organizations. This is really important. It impacts, again, affordability, but it also mirrors what Albertans expect when they go to a bar, restaurant, fast food establishment and they leave a tip.

I will tell you, from consulting on this bill, that when you ask someone who has just left a tip who they think is getting that money, people believe that those tips are going to the workers. Certainly, over and over, when I have this conversation, that’s what I hear. My favourite reaction was one of the grade 6 classes I was talking to. I got shocked Pikachu faces when they heard that the business owners and managers can take those tips and not even necessarily take those tips to reinvest in the business or to run operations. Those tips, earned by workers on the front line, can line business owners’ and managers’ pockets, Mr. Speaker. This does not meet the expectations that Albertans have when they leave. Now, tipping culture as a broad topic: there are a lot of strong opinions. These days it seems like there are electronic machines, and some of them start as high as a default tip of 20 per cent or 25 per cent. But when someone leaves the tips, they expect workers to receive those.

I want to thank the servers, the workers, and others who’ve worked with me on this particular piece of legislation and really drove home how important tipping is and how much of an affordability issue it is. Many, many businesses do give tips to the workers. As is often the case when we deal with issues of employment standards, we need to make sure that the minimum standards are in there because of bad actors. Making sure that Alberta has the same base rights as other jurisdictions I think would be a very, very good idea.

Very briefly, Mr. Speaker, what does Bill 210 do? It ensures that tips and gratuities are the property of the employee. It defines tips and gratuities as well as implementing a system that allows for what’s called pooling agreements. Of course, there are what are called house tipping arrangements, Mr. Speaker, where owners and managers will take tips, but there can also be house tipping arrangements where front of house might tip out back of house; i.e. those who are working in the kitchen or those who are playing the role of hostess. If there is a team of employees together working to provide service, this bill recognizes that and allows that to be accommodated.

The other thing that this bill does in its pooling agreement section is it allows an employer to be party to the pooling agreement in a couple of cases, including when the employer performs, to a substantial degree, the same work performed by the employees. For an example, many small-business owners are perhaps the owner and manager of a small establishment, and at the same time they may work shifts within that establishment as well. This legislation certainly accommodates that.

Now, the one thing I do want to stress, Mr. Speaker, is section 3(a) because it does allow employers to be party to the pooling agreement, but it requires that the employees agree to that. I think

it’s really important, when looking at the issues of workplace dynamics and the power dynamics that can exist, that we should be implementing employee-led solutions in situations like this. That is what we see in Bill 210, which would not only protect tips but allow flexibility in multiple types of workplace establishments.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 210 brings us into the Canadian mainstream. Interestingly enough, when I began working on Bill 210, there were six Canadian jurisdictions that had implemented worker tip protections: British Columbia; Ontario, on which Bill 210 is modelled; New Brunswick; Prince Edward Island; Newfoundland; and Quebec. Then I introduced Bill 210 here in the Alberta Assembly in December 2024, and later that same week Saskatchewan was updating their employment standards to include tip protection. It really just felt like this is the moment to have this conversation. We see Saskatchewan making that move, we see other provinces operating successfully with tip protections, and we see a real affordability need here in this province.

Now, who would this benefit? We know that minimum wage workers often are involved in tipping environments, whether that be retail, a restaurant, or other service. We know that the workers working in establishments where an owner might be taking the tips will often be newcomers and women, so this bill specifically would protect newcomers, women, and other low-wage workers, allowing them to keep more of their earnings.

Mr. Speaker, I am very excited to have the opportunity to bring this forward. In my time in this Assembly I had the honour and privilege of serving as minister of labour, allowing me to get to know the Employment Standards Code, and in my time as minister of labour there were many, many improvements to employment standards I was able to bring forward, everything from increasing the minimum wage to allowing more job-protected leaves, to updating occupational health and safety, so a slightly different piece of legislation but still thinking of some of these same work environments, to make sure that workers were not forced to wear high heels to work if they were doing service industry jobs. Implementing tip protections was not something that we were able to accomplish within the time period of 2015 to 2019, and the need has only gotten greater.

When surveyed, we see that 70 per cent of Albertans support tip protections, and in fact, again, Mr. Speaker, I make the point that many people expect that they are in place and are surprised when they find out they are not. In December of 2024 we saw CBC *Marketplace* do an in-depth analysis and profile on businesses. They went and surveyed 100 Canadian businesses to find out what happens with tips and did a series of reporting on this particular issue.

4:50

Making this within the purview of employment standards and bringing in the excellent employment standards officers who enforce our Employment Standards Code and to give employees a recourse when there may be unfairness or injustice in their workplace just absolutely makes sense. The implementation of this, the pooling agreements as well as how employers will manage these types of tipping arrangements, are things that the government and their employment standards team would be able to determine and work out with employers to make sure that this is rolled out in a way that meets the needs.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, we are currently at second reading. As the mover of this bill, as the drafter of this private member’s bill I would also be more than willing to hear and to look at amendments to make sure that we get this implementation right if there is feedback from the government or other members. I think the concept of tip protection is one that we can all get behind. It’s

certainly one that Albertans are expecting us to implement, and it would make Alberta in the Canadian mainstream when it comes to employment standards and those tip protection rules that we see in seven other jurisdictions.

Again, allow me to say thank you to those who helped with the drafting and with the consultations on this particular piece. I think that, if implemented, it would get wide-standing support. In my research on this, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you I found any number of social media posts or threads where people had discovered that house tipping was a legally allowed practice in Alberta and the only recourse consumers had would be to name those individual organizations that don't allow their staff to keep tips. I found a number of different threads naming and shaming Edmonton restaurants that keep tips. Every time someone finds out about this, they are surprised.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing that I think is incredibly important when we're talking about these issues is that in many jurisdictions business has supported this as well.

Mr. Speaker, if I may just check in with you on how much time I have.

**The Acting Speaker:** Eight minutes on the clock. Yeah.

**Ms Gray:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, I think protecting tips and gratuities, ensuring that they are wages, and making this as part of the Employment Standards Code will address an important affordability issue here in our province, will meet the expectations of Albertans, who are 70 per cent in favour of tip protections, will make a difference in the lives of those working the jobs that rely on tips, which we know are a great deal of Albertans and our colleagues, and will make sure that nonworking owners are not pocketing tips that, as consumers, were intended to go to the workers.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move Bill 210, and I look forward to hearing the government's response.

**The Acting Speaker:** I will recognize the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade.

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and join the debate on Bill 210. Alberta's government certainly understands that Albertans want to see the tips they provide go to the employees who are engaged in providing service to them, including those who you don't see behind the scenes.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's service industry is a cornerstone of our communities and local economies. They provide good-paying, stable jobs to hundreds of thousands of Albertans in every corner of the province. They are critical to our province, and indeed they offer young people, first-time workers, and newcomers an access point into the job market, kick-starting careers by providing real-life work experience.

Right now our small businesses are under immense pressure from a pandemic to high inflation and interest rates and now to trade, economic, and even commodity price volatility. For years this government has worked hard to cut red tape and let businesses breathe so they can grow and hire more people and help drive our economy forward. That work has paid off. Despite international uncertainty Alberta is attracting more investment, more talent, and more opportunity than any other province.

With that backdrop, I'm happy to speak specifically to Bill 210, the intent of which is to provide rules and requirements to enhance tip protection in Alberta. Currently the Employment Standards Code does not address tipping because tips are a voluntary payment and are not considered wages or earnings. As such, employers have discretion to determine how tips are collected and redistributed to

employees or groups of employees based on the realities of their business. A common tip practice is tip pooling, which refers to the collection of employees' tips to be redistributed among some or all employees, which may or may not include management or business owners.

Mr. Speaker, responsible governance starts with talking to the people who will be affected by the laws drafted and debated in this House. In the case of Bill 210 the consultation step – and I appreciate that some has occurred – largely remains undone. I can certainly understand the private members' bill process. I've gone through it myself, and I have high regard for the proponent of the bill. I believe the member opposite, the MLA for Edmonton-Mill Woods, approaches her work with professionalism and dedication, but at this time there has not been sufficient consultation with Alberta's workers and our small and medium enterprises to be considering the substantial changes proposed. That's not how our government makes significant changes.

For example, when we recently made changes to the Occupational Health and Safety Code, we launched an open consultation, received nearly 800 responses, and worked directly with technical experts in the industries affected. We listened and we learned, and because we did it the right way, with workers and employers at the table, those changes had strong support and were implemented smoothly across Alberta. That's good government.

Workers and employers deserve a voice in the decisions that impact their livelihoods and their lives. The recent child care changes were informed by years of engagement with thousands of child care providers in addition to feedback from educators and parents.

Getting back to Bill 210, beyond consultation there is a lack of specificity around tip pooling. It leaves too much for interpretation, opening the door for potential confusion or conflict, and there is the potential for administration and red tape and questions around monitoring and enforcement. It is not clear how tips would be accounted for and distributed to employees, including with respect to electronic payments, and there is no guidance in Bill 210 for how tips should be handled when a pooling agreement is not in place. The bill also tasks employees with driving the establishment of a pool system.

It would seem prudent to enable the overall operation, the ownership and management, to be heavily involved and perhaps drive this process. After all, they are responsible for the viability and sustainability not only of the overall operation but of each employee in their role in the business, so they would likely have a broader vantage point than, say, a single employer or employee group within the business.

There are also unanswered practical and operational questions we need to explore. What if an employee or a number of employees refuse to join a tipping pool? The bill doesn't say who handles it, who's responsible, who mediates. How often are these reviewed? By whom? How do we handle people entering and exiting the pool? The bill also calls for rules on tip sharing between employers and employees who do similar work but never defines what "similar" means. What percentage of an employee's time needs to be spent serving or bussing to be a server or a busser? Over what time period do we measure this? Who measures it? What happens if there is a disagreement on what similar work is?

What if the nature of the business changes? Postpandemic many restaurants' business models fundamentally changed, from majority dine in to now majority takeout. The current system enables the flexibility for tipping structures to adapt to changes in business realities. Ambiguity invites confusion and conflict and risks creating unnecessary and potentially harmful hierarchies and divisions within teams.

Employers would also be prohibited from participating in a tip pool unless all employees agree with their participation. There may be multiple employers or owners. What if they are minority owners with a small ownership stake but otherwise are in every other way just like another employee? How much ownership prevents an owner from participating in a tipping pool? What happens if they cease to be an owner or become an owner? What happens in the case of employee ownership plans and agreements? No Canadian jurisdiction with tip protection laws takes an all-or-nothing approach to employer participation, and I don't recommend Alberta become the first.

Even setting morale and workplace culture aside, we must consider: would this bill be enforceable? While Bill 210 does not identify record-keeping requirements, these would need to be in place prior to implementation to assist with enforcement and monitoring, which will create further administrative burdens for employers. Some jurisdictions require these records to be kept for four years.

**The Acting Speaker:** I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded.

## 5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

### Public Inquiry into AHS Procurement

521. Ms Hoffman moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to take all necessary steps to

- (a) commence a public inquiry in accordance with section 2 of the Public Inquiries Act into recent allegations of improper procurement contracts entered into by Alberta Health Services, including with respect to chartered surgical facilities,
- (b) appoint at least one commissioner who is a judge of the Court of Appeal, the Court of King's Bench, or the Court of Justice in Alberta, and
- (c) declare that section 7 of the Public Inquiries Act applies with respect to the public inquiry.

[Debate adjourned April 7: Ms Hoffman speaking]

**The Acting Speaker:** Hon. members, as you may recall, debate on Motion Other than Government Motion 521 was interrupted by a point of order last Monday before the vote on the motion could take place. Before we proceed to the resumption of debate on Motion Other than Government Motion 521, we must deal with the point of order.

With respect to the point of order, it was called by the Government House Leader at 5:58 on Monday, April 7. The Government House Leader had the opportunity on Monday to make arguments on the point of order. Those remarks can be found on pages 2782 and 2783 of the *Alberta Hansard* from April 7. The Assembly adjourned at the hour of adjournment, 6 p.m., at which point the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, the Deputy Opposition House Leader, was in the midst of making his arguments. Therefore, I will now turn the floor over to either the Opposition House Leader or Deputy Opposition House Leader to finish remarks with respect to this point of order. I see the Deputy Opposition House Leader has risen.

### Point of Order Imputing Motives

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have looked at the transcript from that day – we don't usually get access to the Blues, but it's

nice to have a transcript – so I do exactly know what my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora said and the point that the Government House Leader raised. In the context where the Member for Edmonton-Glenora was talking about the public inquiry and that ongoing corrupt care scandal, she started with:

Again, lots of respect for that judge and for the work that I'm sure he is embarking upon, but it is far from a public inquiry, where it is independent, where the person has the ability to sequester documents, including audio recordings that clearly are out there that relate to this huge corruption scandal. The minister asks: where are the audio recordings? Exactly. The minister certainly hasn't turned them over, but when you look at the response to the statement of defence, Mr. Speaker, through you, the response to the statement of defence very clearly has mastered the vernacular that certain members who are quoted in that document have used.

The Government House Leader stretched it a little bit, as if the Member for Edmonton-Glenora was accusing the Minister of Justice personally to have those audio recordings.

There are many discussions that are happening with respect to this scandal. There are many things going out in those who know this scandal, and certainly there are rumours that there may be audios that were in the possession of not necessarily the minister but the Health department. That's why, I guess, we have been calling for a public inquiry, and that was the context. That member said that in a public inquiry a judge would be able to ask for those things. I don't think that member was accusing the minister personally. It's just that there are some audio recordings that are out there which this judge that government appointed may not have access to, but in a public inquiry those can be asked for and produced. So I do not think it's a point of order.

**The Acting Speaker:** Are there any others that wish to contribute? If not, I am prepared to rule.

It seems to me that the crux of the matter is essentially the audio recordings. The Government House Leader argues that Edmonton-Glenora alleges that the Minister of Justice has these recordings but has not released them, imputing motives that the minister is doing something that is inappropriate. The Deputy Opposition House Leader argues that the Member for Edmonton-Glenora said that the recordings exist but that she did not say that the minister had or that the minister has them. That, as the Deputy Opposition House Leader has alluded to, is in written form in the *Hansard* documents in this way. "The minister asks: where are the audio recordings? Exactly. The minister certainly hasn't turned them over." The first comment in that statement implies that the minister does not know where the recordings are. However, the second one, he "certainly hasn't turned them over," suggests that he may have knowledge of them.

Hon. members, I am in a difficult position because it is hard to know exactly who knew what about the recordings or even if they exist. Accordingly, I would consider this a matter of debate in accordance with *Beauchesne* 494, and therefore I do not find a point of order, but I would caution the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to avoid the speculation that possibly she was engaging in because it can lead to disorder in this Chamber. I will consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

I will open the floor to the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, who has one minute and 43 seconds remaining in her closing remarks, after which the question will be called on Motion Other than Government Motion 521. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, please proceed.

### Debate Continued

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are here because there are significant allegations of chaos, corruption, and cover-up as it relates to government and government subsidiary procurement. Undoubtedly, evidence has surfaced that there have been inflated contracts for private surgical centres. There have been allegations that PPE that was purchased was done so using a preferred vendor and that the PPE has been useless and that exceptional public dollars have been spent on the storage of it. There have been significant allegations of political interference, and I do want to say that the government investigations lack the transparency and accountability that we all deserve. The scope is limited, key individuals who are implicated still are in power, and positions of power have for some even gotten greater.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The response to the statement of defence that I referred to, where the CEO certainly masters the speaking habits of ministers and deputy ministers with precision, led me to believe that there could be additional documents that we may not have. With that in mind, this is one of the reasons why I think it's so important for us to have a fully independent public inquiry, where the person who's presiding has the ability to subpoena individuals and to request all documents.

With that, I will say that everyone in this place has an opportunity to vote on this motion right now with their conscience. I believe that all of us deserve transparency and accountability so that when we answer to our constituents, we can do so with confidence that we did indeed gather all the information that was possibly available to increase confidence in the ability of Albertans to trust their government.

Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 521 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:08 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Al-Guneid	Ganley	Metz
Arcand-Paul	Goehring	Miyashiro
Brar	Gray	Pancholi
Calahoo Stonehouse	Guthrie	Renaud
Ceci	Haji	Sabir
Chapman	Hayter	Shepherd
Dach	Hoffman	Sinclair
Eggen	Ip	Tejada
Ellingson	Kasawski	Wright, P.
Elmeligi	Kayande	

Against the motion:

Amery	Johnson	Sawhney
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Jones	Schow
Boitchenko	LaGrange	Schulz
Bouchard	Loewen	Sigurdson, R.J.
Cyr	Long	Singh
de Jonge	Lovely	Smith
Dreeshen	Lundy	Stephan
Dyck	McDougall	Turton
Ellis	McIver	van Dijken

Fir	Nally	Wiebe
Getson	Neudorf	Williams
Glubish	Nixon	Wilson
Horner	Petrovic	Wright, J.
Hunter	Pitt	Yao
Jean	Rowswell	Yaseen
Totals:	For – 29	Against – 45

[Motion Other than Government Motion 521 lost]

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

**Ms Chapman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move that the Assembly consider Motion Other than Government Motion 522 as its next item of business this afternoon in accordance with standing orders 8(1.2) and 8(1.3).

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, pursuant to standing orders 8(1.2) and 8(1.3) this is a nondebatable motion.

[Motion carried]

### K to 12 School Class Size

522. Ms Chapman moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to take the necessary steps to address overcrowded classrooms by hiring additional teaching staff to ensure that all Alberta classrooms meet the recommended class size based on grade level for kindergarten to grade 12 as set out in the 2003 Alberta's Commission on Learning report Every Child Learns; Every Child Succeeds.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington has the call.

**Ms Chapman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to bring this Motion 522 for debate in this House.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

There are a number of issues facing our education system right now. I think we're on six years of the current iteration of a Conservative provincial government, and the impact is being felt quite strongly in our schools. Now, unfortunately, we know that the government hasn't been building the schools Albertans need, and so all across the province we have classrooms that are bursting at the seams. I love visiting schools, but it's quite hard for me now to see classrooms being held in hallways. I do worry, and I know that parents and teachers worry as well, about our ability to deliver an excellent education in the boot room.

Now that this government seems to have woken up to their past failures of building schools and have come forward with a promise to get going on building the schools we need, I thought this would be an appropriate time to open the conversation about class sizes. Now, unfortunately, the UCP did remove public class size reporting. Normally I would start with an examination of where we're at when it comes to class sizes, but this government has made that impossible. In 2019 the UCP removed the grant funding for the class size initiative, that was based on the results of an Auditor General report, but at the same time they removed the public reporting measures without ever providing an explanation for why they did so. To be fair, I mean, what explanation could you possibly cobble together to explain why you are choosing to be less transparent to the public about your use of public dollars? The UCP dodged a bullet here, certainly.

[The Speaker in the chair]

One can only assume that with dozens of schools across the province well over 100 per cent utilization, class sizes have in fact gone through the roof. But given the absence of good data provided by the UCP, I guess what the government wants me to rely on are anecdotes, and the anecdotes are hair raising. I hear regularly from teachers and parents about elementary school class sizes ranging from 20 to 25 kids. In junior high you're lucky if you can be in a class of 30, and for high school – I was talking to a chem 30 teacher a few days ago. He has 46 students in his class. I asked if he had the lab space to accommodate that many students, and he just laughed and then looked really sad.

5:30

A couple of years ago the CBC did do some reporting on the issue of class size, and they had another high school chemistry teacher, actually, quoted in that article saying: students are really missing out on, really, the practical aspect. We hear from the University of Calgary that students don't know how to do some basic skills in the lab that they used to be pretty competent at. I remember chem 30, and I remember that the standard was lab work done in pairs. What I'm hearing from these chemistry teachers now, what they're telling me is that students actually do fewer labs, and they're working in lab groups of four or five, so no wonder these students aren't graduating with the basic lab skills they used to have. Some of them aren't even getting a chance to get their hand on a pipette. Yes, I remember that word from chem 30, and I wanted to use it here.

That's the situation as of today. Since removing the funding under the class size initiative program, the government has been largely silent on the issue of class sizes. No new programs have been announced to tackle the issue. No new funding has been allocated. If anything, the opposite is true, because successive budgets have kept funding for education below population and inflation growth. But even if this government doesn't want to fund for the reality that the cost of everything has gone up, school boards are still paying higher prices. Insurance, utilities, books, even paper: those costs are higher, and school boards are paying those costs whether they want to or not.

Chinook's Edge school board actually recently reported that the cost of purchasing a school bus had gone up over 10 per cent just in a single year. Talking to a number of other school boards, between the cost of acquiring buses, insurance, fuel, and maintenance, the cost of transporting kids to school has almost doubled in less than a decade. Funding for transportation certainly hasn't doubled in that time, so, again, school boards are downloading the growing costs of transportation to parents, just one more way the UCP is making life less affordable for Albertans.

When you have a system that isn't funding to keep pace with growth and growing costs in the system, what are the chances that funds will be available to hire the teaching staff needed to address class sizes? Very low, obviously. So what we're asking for in this motion is for the government to refocus and reset. Right now their focus is on choice in education. Now, that doesn't mean choice in programming, of course. They simply mean choice in school provider, so that focus is on expanding access to charter and private schools, and that's particularly interesting when it comes to a discussion of class sizes. These are the programs that the government increasingly wants to offer to Albertans, and, of course, these are the programs that are able to offer controlled class sizes.

Public schools, on the other hand, are obliged to accept every single student who walks through their door, and that's regardless of the needs of the student and regardless of the utilization rate of the school or school board. That student must be accommodated.

Charter and private schools, on the other hand, are able to select their students. They are allowed to turn away students who are not a fit for their programming. I'd love to have a really data-informed discussion here about class size comparisons between our school systems. What's the average class size of, say, a charter school compared to a public school in the area? That might inform our decisions about why parents are choosing charter. It might help us use charters for their intended purpose. Charters were meant to be a place to experiment and innovate and then bring those learnings back into the public system so that all children can benefit.

Interestingly, the Alberta's Commission on Learning report, that forms the basis of this motion today, has a recommendation around charter schools, recommendation 26: maintain "limits on the number of charter schools and the length of their terms and expand efforts to share their outcomes with the rest of the education system." This report had a number of good recommendations, Mr. Speaker, aside from class sizes, but, unfortunately, I don't think that's the direction this government is going in.

So let's just talk specifically about recommendation 14 in the report, and that is what we're talking about today. "Establish and implement province-wide guidelines for average class sizes across school jurisdictions." Now, the report is clear that rather than legislated limits, hard limits, we should have some flexibility in the size of classes. School jurisdictions should be expected to meet guidelines on average class sizes across jurisdictions. The recommendations for class sizes contained in the report are 17 students for kindergarten to grade 3 classes, 23 students for grades 4 to 6, 25 students for junior high, and then 27 for high school classes.

Mr. Speaker, we're not even asking with this motion for the same class sizes that private schools get. When we look at private schools who are, you know, often very public about their class sizes, a school like Delta West has an average class size of 15. High school classes at Strathcona-Tweedsmuir cap out at 20. Webber doesn't go above 22 students. If there are updated recommendations on class sizes, I would certainly be happy to hear from the minister on this, but, as I mentioned, again, I have seen nothing come out from this government on class sizes. What I hear from educators is that teachers are drowning and kids are struggling in overcrowded classrooms. Class sizes are out of control, and our classrooms are more complex than ever. I know the minister will refer to Alberta's PISA scores, but I think we all know that education is about more than how our kids perform on a single standardized test.

I ask all members of this House to support this motion to address overcrowded classrooms by hiring the teaching staff needed. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** I might just ask the hon. member if she would mind perhaps saying the following: with that, I move Motion Other than Government Motion 522.

**Ms Chapman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With that, I move Motion Other than Government Motion 522.

**The Speaker:** Perfect. Thank you so much. I thought you'd never. Are there others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

**Mr. McDougall:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak against Motion 522. At first glance I understand why this motion might seem to be a good idea; after all, who doesn't want to support our teachers and school communities? Certainly, as somebody who has a number of family members who are educators and many people in my constituency that want us to support the education system, that would, you know, plausibly make sense.

But when you look beyond the surface, it becomes clear that this motion doesn't offer anything new. It simply restates what our government is already doing and doing well. The motion doesn't introduce anything new. It simply calls for what has already been delivered. Frankly, this motion is like a child asking their parent for a \$50 weekly allowance when they're already getting a \$100 allowance. It's not just unnecessary; it misses the bigger picture, showing a lack of understanding and appreciation of the significant progress being made across our education system.

The members who are opposite quickly discard the fact that Alberta, with the PISA exams, ranks the highest in the country and one of the highest in the world in terms of the results that we're currently getting in our education system. Now, I will not say that class size is not a factor, but it's a factor, one of many. There are other issues that are at least equally if not more important than class size: the quality of instruction, the complexity issues within the classroom, the availability of education assistants, home environment, and the reality of, you know, what actually happens out there in the workplace.

For example, what do you do if – in the case of the 2003 report it recommends 17 students for K to 3. What happens when you have 24 students in the school? Across the province in many different jurisdictions you have many different situations where the school is trying to fit the best, optimal situation given the exact number of students that are in the school and the number of spaces available and the number of teachers available and the different complexities within each classroom. There may be certain classes where there's a lot of complexity and you need to have a much smaller class size and another class where, perhaps, a more experienced teacher or a set of students that are without the complexities, and then you can afford to work with more students in the classroom.

5:40

What is relevant? There are many things that are relevant. It's not a single factor here. High-quality curriculum, teacher training and professional development, the degree of inclusion, assessment and accountability, community and parental involvement, and, of course, investment in education and the necessary tools and infrastructure, which includes technology, which has changed a lot since 2003. I guess, you know, the other thing is that this motion ignores the reality of what has been going on in this province: the rapid growth in population, the exploding increase in complexity in the classroom, the shortage of teachers and teachers' assistants, and, of course, physical space, that we've already said that we're going to address.

What exactly we're seeing in this motion is that Alberta's education is already receiving record-level investments under this government. We are making promises, and we're delivering on the results. We're making historic investments in education, real, tangible investments that are already making a difference in classrooms across the province. Through Budget 2025 the Education budget will reach a record high of \$9.88 billion, an increase of \$426 million from the previous year. This is a meaningful commitment to students, families, and communities.

The motion suggests that more needs to be done. We don't disagree, but we are doing more. In fact, we are doing the most we've ever done, more than the NDP did when they were in government. The United Conservative government is delivering results and investing in a system that is meeting the evolving needs of Albertans, including the exploding population and complexity in this province.

Mr. Speaker, we know that an education policy means using our dollars wisely and ensuring that investments are going towards hiring teachers, reducing class sizes, supporting students with

complex needs, and building modern, functional learning spaces. Spaces and dollars per capita, which the opposite members like to talk about, do not define the results. New York spends \$33,000 U.S. per student and gets worse results than Alberta. California spends \$18,000 U.S. per student and gets worse results than Alberta. So it's not just a question of class size or money; there are other things that are involved that are important.

Since coming into power, our government has focused on making smart, responsible, and community-driven decisions, something the members opposite clearly struggled with during their time in office, which is why Albertans chose to send them packing after just four years. In contrast, our government's commitment to education is clear, consistent, and delivering real results. Budget 2025 proves that commitment, and the results speak for themselves. We're investing \$1.1 billion over the next three years to help school authorities hire over 4,000 teachers, educational assistants, and support staff. This isn't speculation. It's reality. We're responding to enrolment growth through thoughtful planning and strong financial backing.

We're also increasing classroom complexity funding by 20 per cent to a total of \$55 million in '25-26, helping to ensure that students who have special needs receive the support they need to thrive.

We've also tackled space pressures head-on. For the '24-25 school year, our government funded 182 new modular classrooms, creating space for an additional 4,550 students, and reallocated 31 modular units to areas with the greatest need. That's real, proactive action to address overcrowding.

Let's be clear, Mr. Speaker. The pressure on our schools is a direct result of this government's strong economic policies. Alberta is growing because people are choosing to move here, whether from other provinces or from abroad. This unprecedented population growth is a sign of confidence in our province, and we are responding with the infrastructure supports needed to meet that demand. Of course, with a landmark \$8.6 billion investment to support more than 200,000 new and modernized student spaces, we are transforming education infrastructure across the province. Budget 2025 has allocated funding for 41 school projects: 30 new schools, five replacements, three modernizations, and three charter school expansions, 14 in Edmonton and 18 in Calgary alone. These aren't just numbers; these are new classrooms, new learning opportunities, and new hope for families in rapidly growing communities.

Let me be clear. Motion 522 isn't necessary, not because I disagree with supporting education but because we're already doing the work. We are partnering with school authorities to deliver the spaces, staff, and support that students need, all while being fiscally responsible with taxpayer dollars.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans expect us to be responsible stewards of public funds. They want smart solutions, not political theatrics. Motion 522 may look well intentioned on the surface, but it's redundant and unnecessary, especially when real progress is already under way. We don't need performative motions that merely check the political box. We need continued investment, meaningful partnerships, and responsible leadership that puts students first. That's precisely what this government is delivering, and we'll keep doing this.

I therefore oppose Motion 522 because Albertans deserve better. This motion is simply a waste of legislative time, especially when our government is already doing more than the motion is calling for. The NDP loves nothing more than wasting valuable time and money. Their government catastrophically failed Albertans and set our province back many years. We will not allow their outlandish waste to set this province back anymore. We're not just making



promises; we're delivering results. We must vote down this ridiculous motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

**Mr. Ip:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nothing could be further from the truth. The member opposite is incorrect. To quote the Speaker, size matters. Classroom size, that is. It's my pleasure to rise today to speak in strong support of Motion 522, a motion that urges this government to take real, immediate steps to address the overcrowding crisis in our classrooms by hiring additional teaching staff and to finally meet the class size guidelines recommended in the 2003 Alberta's Commission on Learning, ACOL, report, entitled Every Child Learns. Every Child Succeeds. I want to recognize my colleague from Calgary-Beddington for bringing this motion and this debate to the Chamber.

Let's be clear. Alberta classrooms are overcrowded, underfunded, and at breaking point. This motion is about students, it's about teachers, it's about educational support staff, and it's about the future of public education in Alberta. Let's face it. You can't address something if you don't measure it, if you don't understand it.

Before proceeding with the debate, I want to talk about why I'm here. So many of us in this Chamber ran for particular reasons, ran because we had certain convictions; our why, if you will. For me, my why was public education, to which I owe my success as an Albertan. I've previously spoken in this House about my journey, about my family's journey to Canada, and how I attribute our success here to the sense of community and a robust, sound public education system. I'm proud to have served as an Edmonton public school board trustee for 10 years, advocating for parents, students, and community. As a school board trustee I've warned about class sizes and the lack of school space along with my colleagues on the board at that time. I've warned about the looming crisis that schools across Alberta face. In fact, as recently as September 2022 I talked about how schools have reached a crisis point. What I've seen since this government has taken office, since the UCP has taken office, is that they have consistently failed students.

5:50

Let's talk about what's happening in our schools right now. At Edmonton public schools, for example, the average kindergarten to grade 3 class is 35 per cent more than the recommended average class size. In some cases that number climbs to 38 students per class. So imagine this. Imagine 38 five- to six-year-olds in one classroom all needing attention, care, and instruction. In grades 4 through 6 some classes have ballooned to 41 students. Junior high classes have taught 56 students in some cases. And in high schools across this province teachers are facing classes of 50 students or more. We're not just talking about numbers; these are children. I think every single one of us would agree that children, young people are the greatest resource of our province.

Let's not lose sight of what we're talking about here. I think we all agree that students deserve the same chance to succeed as any other child in this country. Every student we lose in an overcrowded classroom is a lost opportunity, a missed connection, a voice we didn't get the chance to hear. Judging by the members opposite's comments, clearly members opposite haven't been to a classroom recently. This situation doesn't just affect students' ability to succeed academically. It's impacting their mental health, their relationships with teachers, their sense of belonging.

**Ms Hoffman:** Safety.

**Mr. Ip:** Safety. When students are in overcrowded classrooms, they lose access to individualized attention. They're more likely to feel isolated, to struggle quietly, and to disengage. And for students who are already vulnerable, the lack of attention can be catastrophic.

Frankly, Mr. Speaker, I'm appalled by the precipitous decline of our public education system since this government took office. I regularly meet with parents who tell me their stories of their child who is left behind and who struggles in school. I speak to school administrators who feel that they aren't able to adequately support students who require specialized supports but do their very best to meet the needs of every child despite the lack of teachers and resources.

It's not just class sizes; it's classroom complexity. According to the Alberta Teachers' Association 90 per cent of teachers are reporting higher complexity in their classrooms. Half have faced aggression or violence at work in the last school year. More than half report a decrease in support for students with complex needs. Frankly, Mr. Speaker, it's not fair to students. It's not fair to students who require specialized supports. I had the opportunity early in my career to work with an organization called Inclusion Alberta, that would support families with children with developmental disabilities, and I learned during that time when I was there that often behaviour is a way of communication. To so many students who may require those specialized supports, who might be nonverbal, without the supports in the classroom they're just not able to succeed.

I was around as a school board trustee when Inspiring Education was launched over a decade ago and a few administrations ago. At that point, the previous Education Act put in legislation that inclusion in community, in the community school was the first choice and first priority for families. That was an incredible, wonderful aspiration, one that was supported by many families with children with special needs. But in the ensuing decade we haven't seen any supports from this government, unfortunately, to support that vision. Since this government took power, I have to say, rather than seeing any meaningful investment that keeps up with the population growth of students or the growth of students that we're seeing across Alberta, we've, in fact, only seen obfuscation. We've seen that this government will creatively rework funding formulas which amount to, basically, effective cuts to education. This is unsustainable, Mr. Speaker, yet year after year the UCP government misses its own teacher hiring targets, by 106 teachers this year alone.

Even more troublingly, 2024 saw 33,000 new students enter the system, but only 694 teachers were added. That's one new teacher for every 48 new students. Let's put that into perspective. Imagine trying to teach math to a room of 30 students, some of whom are newcomers learning English, some of whom are neurodiverse, some of whom require behaviour supports, and all of whom deserve a fair shot. Now imagine trying to do that while also managing overcrowding, limited prep time, and growing administrative demands. No teacher can effectively teach in these conditions, and no student can learn effectively in these conditions. It is not fair, Mr. Speaker.

We are hearing from teachers who are burning out, who are leaving the profession not because they no longer love teaching but because they simply cannot continue under these circumstances. When we lose experienced teachers, we lose mentorship, institutional knowledge, and consistency, and that hurts our entire education system.

Mr. Speaker, this motion has a very simple ask. It's asking the government to do the right thing, invest in education, and take the first step by measuring class sizes and hiring the teachers that we need. Thank you very much.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and to speak to this motion brought forward by my colleague from Calgary-Beddington, who has been a staunch advocate for public education, for the betterment of public education, for schools in our communities and our ridings. I thank her for the work she has done to improve education in our province.

We do know that our population is growing, our province is growing, and in order to meet that growing need, we have to keep up with investing into our education system. Government takes credit when there is population growth, but what government fails to do is to keep up with government's responsibility of making sure that those who are choosing Alberta as their home have the opportunities to be successful here, they have the schools that they can enrol their kids into, they have affordable housing that they can find to put a roof over their heads, they have a hospital system, they have some family doctors that they can reach out to and seek the

care they need, and they have the services that they need to be successful here.

What we have seen from this government is that, for the most part, public education is not a priority for this government; public health care is not a priority for this government. I won't be wrong that if you put "public" beside anything, that's not a priority for this government. If you put "public" before an inquiry, that is not a priority for this government because the name "public" is attached to it. Basically, anything public the government won't support.

Classroom sizes are a huge issue. We do know that they are overcrowded. We have data. We hear stories every day on the doorstep when we interact with parents, when we interact with teachers, when we interact with school administrators. They are telling us that class sizes are not manageable.

**The Speaker:** I hesitate to interrupt. However, pursuant to Standing Order 4(2) the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

## Table of Contents

Prayers .....	2869
In Memoriam	
Dr. Rajinder Singh “Raj” Pannu January 12, 1934, to January 30, 2025.....	2869
Indigenous Land Acknowledgement .....	2869
Introduction of Visitors .....	2869
Introduction of Guests .....	2869
Members’ Statements	
Federal Policies and Energy Development .....	2870
Investigation of Health Services Procurement.....	2870
Council of State Governments.....	2871
Investigation of Health Services Procurement.....	2879
Council of State Governments.....	2879
AISH Client Benefits.....	2880
Oral Question Period	
Investigation of Health Services Procurement.....	2871, 2873
Premier’s Leadership.....	2872
Administration of Elections.....	2873
Postsecondary Capital Projects.....	2874
Parent and Guardian Liaison .....	2875
Child Care Affordability.....	2875
Trade with the U.S. Midwest.....	2876
OCYA Investigations of Deaths of Youth in Care .....	2876
Economic Corridors.....	2877
Surgery Wait Times.....	2877
Conservation Holdbacks on Water Transfers .....	2878
Government Policies .....	2878
Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees .....	2880
Notices of Motions .....	2880
Tabling Returns and Reports .....	2880
Tablings to the Clerk .....	2881
Orders of the Day .....	2883
Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 209 Reconciliation Implementation Act.....	2883
Division .....	2890
Bill 210 Employment Standards (Protecting Workers’ Tips) Amendment Act, 2024.....	2890
Motions Other than Government Motions	
Public Inquiry into AHS Procurement.....	2893
Division .....	2894
K to 12 School Class Size.....	2894

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