



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, April 28, 2025

Day 102

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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

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Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Edmonton-Ellerslie
Vacant, Edmonton-Strathcona

Party standings:

United Conservative: 47

New Democrat: 36

Independent: 2

Vacant: 2

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Eggen
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Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, April 28, 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, it being the first sitting day of the week, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem, O Canada, by the Chronos Vocal Ensemble. Please feel free to participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all of us command.
Car ton bras sait porter l'épée,
Il sait porter la croix!
Ton histoire est une épopée
Des plus brillants exploits.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

[Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Just like when I sing it in the shower.

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.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, seated in my gallery are the family of a former member, who the Assembly has already paid tribute to, the hon. Guy Boutilier, who sadly passed away on March 8, 2024. The family of former Member Boutilier were here earlier to receive the King Charles III coronation medal from the hon. the Minister of Energy and Minerals. The hon. Guy Boutilier served as a member for Fort McMurray and Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo from 1997 to 2012, first as a Progressive Conservative Party member and then with the Wildrose Alliance caucus in his final two terms.

The hon. Mr. Guy Boutilier was an accomplished individual who held various cabinet positions during his time in government, including Minister of Municipal Affairs, minister of environment, minister of international, intergovernmental, and Aboriginal relations. Before his provincial career as a politician the hon. Guy Boutilier earned a master's degree in public administration at Harvard, after which he came to Alberta, where he began his work

as a public servant in Fort McMurray, then served as a councillor in the city of Fort McMurray as well as the youngest mayor of the municipality. For over 15 years he had an incredible impact on this Assembly, and his legacy lives long after his passing.

We are honoured to have seated in the Speaker's gallery today his loving wife, Gail Boutilier; son Marc; sister Trina; nieces Elle and Bailey, nieces Kelsey and Katherine; and cousins Andrew and Brent. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. [Standing ovation]

Hon. members, today we heard an absolutely stirring rendition of O Canada performed by the Chronos Vocal Ensemble. The ensemble was founded in 2013 by Jordan Van Biert and combines a commitment to traditional choral repertoire with a passion for new Canadian choral music. The ensemble has delighted audiences throughout Alberta and particularly concerts here in Edmonton, tours in four different provinces, and at Canada's national choral festival. The ensemble has released four recordings featuring new Canadian choral music and won in 2015 the grand prize in the National Competition for Canadian Amateur Choirs. The arrangement which they sang today – you may be familiar with O Canada – was composed by Mr. Stuart Beatch, who is also here with us today, and it was their first performance of this arrangement. I invite you to all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly a wonderful group of students from A.L. Horton school from Vegreville, Alberta. It was a pleasure to meet with these bright youngsters and future politicians this morning, their parent and teacher chaperones also, and I hope they enjoyed their day at the Legislature. I'd like the group to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Children and Family Services.

Mr. Turton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly two separate groups. Number one, Michelle Chidley and Ashley Eberle from Fertility Alberta. I understand that they met with the Minister of Health today, and I'm honoured to support their important work in assisting families facing fertility challenges.

As well, I'm delighted to welcome a grade 6 class from SML Christian Academy located in Stony Plain, as well as my good friend, Angela Meyer. Please stand to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you I'd like to introduce my fabulous staff from Edmonton-West Henday. I have Adiatu Kuyatah, Kate Pugh, Jolene Morin, and Victor Keita-Khemolia. I can't do my work here without them, so please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

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

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you a group of friends from Fort McMurray who have joined the minister of energy and myself as we recognize the contributions of the late hon. Guy Boutilier, former MLA for Fort

McMurray-Wood Buffalo. I invite them to stand and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

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

Member Irwin: Thank you. I'd like to introduce two of my constituents, Judith Dyck and Desmond King. Judith is a retired communications professional who worked on public sector issues for over 30 years, including working in the Premier's office for four years in the '90s, and she's an active volunteer. Desmond is a retired Chevron president, the former general manager of the Alberta EnviroFuels plant in Strathcona, and the former chair of the Strathcona Industrial Association. I got it all in. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly my parents, who raised me, instilled in me strong morals and values, all of which are allowing me to continue to earn the trust of the people of Grande Prairie to represent them in the House. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Ms Hoffman: I'm proud to introduce two U of A students, Ella Derenowski, who is studying education and specifically a focus on the effects of health care privatization in Canada, and Alisha Jamal, who is a political science student. I ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly along with Chad Ohman, who is part of the choir and is a constituent of Edmonton-Glenora.

Members' Statements

Lapu-Lapu Day Incident in Vancouver

Ms Lovely: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my deepest sorrow and condemnation in response to the tragic events that took place at the Lapu-Lapu festival in Vancouver this past weekend. What should have been a joyful celebration of Filipino culture and heritage ended in the unthinkable act of violence that has left families shattered, communities grieving, and our nation in mourning.

The Filipino-Canadian community is known across Alberta and Canada for its kindness, resilience, and remarkable contributions to our society. They are our neighbours, our colleagues, and our friends. In every corner of our province Filipino Canadians have helped build stronger, more vibrant communities through their hard work, generosity, and spirit of service. Here in Alberta we are proud to be home of one of the largest and fastest growing communities in Canada. From Calgary to Edmonton, communities large and small across the province, Filipino Albertans strengthen our social fabric, enrich our culture, and contribute to every aspect of our society. In business and health care, in education and public service their impact is profound and invaluable.

What happened in Vancouver is incomprehensible. It is unthinkable that such violence could occur at an event meant to celebrate unity, culture, and community pride. Our hearts are heavy with sorrow for the victims, their loved ones, and all who were impacted by the senseless attack. Albertans stand in unwavering solidarity. Vancouver's Filipino community and Filipino Canadians across the country: we grieve with you. We pray for the recovery of the injured, for the comfort of those who mourn, and for justice to be served.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all members of this Assembly I extend our deepest condolences to the families affected, our steadfast

support to the Filipino community. May the victims be remembered, the survivors find healing, and may we all honour their memory by standing together in unity, peace, and strength.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein has a statement to make.

Lapu-Lapu Day Incident in Vancouver

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in sombre remembrance of the lives lost this weekend at the Lapu-Lapu festival in Vancouver on April 26 and the unspeakable violence that stole the lives of 11 people, including a five-year-old child.

On Saturday the Filipino community hosted a celebration in honour of Lapu-Lapu, an Indigenous Filipino hero whose story is a testament to the resilience and love we witness in this community every day. Young and old gather to dance, eat, and share the richness of Filipino traditions with all of their neighbours.

The shock from the ensuing violence will reverberate for some time. Families lost their light across generations, many were injured, and we know that many are in hospital, still fighting to survive right now. While the tragedy took place in B.C., the devastation can be felt across our nation. We all grieve with Filipino Canadians as they navigate the unimaginable loss of beloved community members and contend with the injuries and trauma resulting from this violent attack. We hold space for the families, the organizers, the volunteers, attendees, and the first responders who have all been affected by this tragedy.

The love, strength, faith, and unity of the Filipino community is well known, but know that you're not alone in this journey. I think I can speak for every member in this Chamber when I say that our hearts are with you in these difficult moments and as you move through grief. I wish you solace, comfort, and healing. If you or someone you know has been directly impacted by this tragedy, you can reach out to victim services at VictimLinkBC at 1.800.563.0808.

Thank you. [Standing ovation]

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

Ponoka U15 Girls Soccer Team

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize an extraordinary group of young women from central Alberta. The Ponoka Storm U15 girls soccer team will be representing our province and our country this July at the IberCup in Portugal, one of the largest international youth soccer tournaments in the world. These athletes come from Ponoka, Lacombe, Stettler, Red Deer, Rocky Mountain House, and Camrose. Many of them have played together since Timbits, starting at the age of five. Today, through hard work and determination, they've risen from tier 4 to tier 2 competition, most recently earning silver at the U15 tier 2 indoor provincials.

Mr. Speaker, this achievement didn't happen overnight. This international opportunity is the result of two years of focused planning, fundraising, and relentless effort by the coaches, the parents, and, most importantly, these athletes themselves. These girls trained through long Alberta winters, competed against much larger city teams with deep rosters, and never let their small-town beginnings hold them back.

Their accomplishments go far beyond the soccer pitch. These girls are role models in their communities. When they're not training or competing, they're coaching younger players, they're

volunteering at the grassroots level, and giving back to the very communities that raised them. They carry their small-town values with pride, and they show us that true success is not only measured by medals but by character and by contribution. In a time when community spirit is more important than ever, these girls show us what it means to be proud Albertans. They embrace their rural roots, compete with heart, and lift each other and their communities up along the way.

As they prepare to step onto the global stage in Portugal, we stand behind them, united in pride. They're not only competitors but outstanding ambassadors of Alberta's values, resilience, and community spirit, and I ask all members to join me in congratulating the Ponoka Storm and wishing them every success. We're truly proud of them and hope to see them compete on the Olympic stage one day.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the following member's statement will conclude with a moment of silence. This member statement will be completed when the bell rings.

National Day of Mourning

Member Arcand-Paul: On this day of mourning all of us in this Chamber must take the time to think about the countless workers who have tragically lost their lives due to illness or injuries sustained in the workplace. This includes workers building this province while continuing to make our province the best it can possibly be. Today we think of and give thanks in a good way to those 203 Albertans who have passed away in 2024.

Today and every day we must remember those who have lost their lives because of unsafe working conditions. It is our job to make these conditions better for all workers in the province. We must always strive in this House, on both sides of the aisle, to make the lives of Albertans better but, most importantly, to look after those who build our province: the workers in all industries. Workers deserve a safe workplace and to be recognized for their important and massive contributions, especially when they have lost their lives.

I would like to take the remaining time I have left for a moment of silent reflection to remember those 203 Albertans who we lost just last year.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Dow Chemical's Fort Saskatchewan Ethylene Project

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, on Thursday Dow Chemical said that their \$12 billion investment in the Fort Saskatchewan ethylene cracker and derivative site is now paused. This is a massive net-zero economic project that Alberta needs. Thousands of jobs and billions in investment are now delayed because of the economic uncertainty coming from the White House. Will the Premier admit that her trips to America, her warm embrace of the American far right, and her repeated attacks on the net-zero concept have all failed to protect this important Dow project for Alberta?

Ms Smith: Wow. Is that ever a ridiculous question, Mr. Speaker. It is this government that created the Alberta petrochemical incentive program. It is this government that co-ordinated seven departments to get them to a final investment decision. It is this government who has promised \$1.8 billion worth of refundable tax credits, who

worked collaboratively with the federal government to get \$800 million in matching support. This government supports this project. We're proud of the fact that Dow Chemical chose Alberta for this one-of-a-kind net-zero project, and their delay in construction means that the project will still be on track for 2028.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the petrochemical incentive program is part of the NDP climate leadership program. You're welcome.

The heartland and capital regions would have benefited greatly from the economic activity during the assembly and operation of Dow's net-zero cracker. Unions like the Building Trades stood to see thousands of their members employed, creating good jobs while diversifying our petrochemical sector. Despite what the Premier has promised, Trump's chaos has now cost Alberta. Will the Premier admit that her supposed diplomacy has failed and posting clips of her trashing net zero doesn't help?

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the government.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure what the member opposite is referring to. When I go on my international trade missions, when I give speeches, I talk about Dow Chemical's net-zero petrochemical program, Air Products' net-zero hydrogen program, Linde's collaboration with net-zero hydrogen, and we hope to see soon a net-zero Heidelberg plant making net-zero cement. I don't quite know what the member opposite is referring to, but we know that in times of economic uncertainty you do end up having investment decisions reconsidered and delayed. This is going to be a delay until 2028.

Ms Gray: It's clear that this government is blind, that when they are trying to score political points, they don't see the impact they're having on real-world economic projects. The Premier has wasted time and tax dollars cozying up to the American far right. The Premier has recognized that this project has stalled because of, quote, global uncertainty that's been created by the tariff war. The new American agenda is hurting Alberta's economy. With the pause of this \$12 billion investment, will the Premier finally admit her approach and actions have cost this province? Will she finally join the rest of Team Canada and start providing a unified front against economic chaos?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, when you have global economic uncertainty, you do end up having demand for certain products fall. This particular program is going to develop plastic pellets that are used for input into cars and durable goods. All of the product being produced is destined for the port of Prince Rupert, which will then go internationally. The general global economic uncertainty has caused them to delay and slow down the construction, but they are still committed to opening up in 2028.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition for question 2.

Investigation of Health Services Procurement

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the Premier's former Minister of Infrastructure had a front-seat view at the cabinet table in the lead-up and start of the corrupt care scandal. In a letter he released last week, he agreed with the Official Opposition that Judge Wyant is "limited by a narrow mandate designed to deflect criticism rather than uncovering the truth." He also said, "this review resembles a classic 'Whitewash Report,' seemingly designed to conceal wrongdoing rather than expose it." What is this Premier hiding from Albertans, including from her own cabinet? Why does she continue to refuse to call a full public inquiry?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nothing. We are putting forward anything it is that the judge wishes to ask for. I would invite the members opposite to read through the terms of reference. They're very, very broad, and Judge Wyant is able to ask for any materials that he needs to interview any person that he wishes to. He's going to be making an interim report available at the end of May, and it will be public in July. There are other parallel processes that are going on, but we hope that this early report gives us some indication if there's anything we need to change in procurement.

Ms Gray: Everyone with concerns has read the terms of reference. He doesn't have the power to subpoena. He doesn't have the power of a full public inquiry.

Now, the former minister is free to admit that what Judge Wyant is doing is not going to get to the bottom. He echoed our concerns and said, "witnesses are not compelled to testify, and any information provided is tightly controlled by government officials." He also agreed with us that "a number of key personnel and senior staff within AHS have already been dismissed, further [hindering] the credibility." If those who were around the Premier's cabinet table don't believe this fake inquiry, why would anyone else? It's time.

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this side we're prepared to wait until Judge Wyant does his report, and if any of the issues the member opposite identifies are problematic, no doubt he will mention that in his report. As I understand it, he is receiving all of the same information that the Auditor General is receiving. As I understand it, he is on track to give us a preliminary report at the end of May. I look forward to reading it. I hope it has some recommendations, and if so, we will act on them quickly.

Ms Gray: This is a classic government cover-up. As we have said, as Albertans have said, the retired judge won't be able to get to the bottom of this scandal. Even the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane can now admit the judge's process "lacks the mechanisms necessary to pursue accountability." Only a real public inquiry will do. The Premier knows. She's been in politics for years. A fully independent public inquiry is the only way out of this mess. Albertans want real answers. Will she call a real, full public inquiry today?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We will wait for the outcome of the judge's report. The members opposite sure seem intent on trashing people's character prior to being able to see what kind of work they can do. This is an independent judge who was at the head of the courts in Manitoba. I trust his integrity. I'm interested in seeing what his results are. If there are any issues that he has in not being able to get the information, I'm quite sure that he will either put it into his report, make an inquiry, or make it public. At the moment we believe that he is on track to give us a report by the end of June.

The Speaker: The hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Chief Medical Officer of Health

Ms Gray: There is a pattern of this government repeatedly tying up professionals who are trusted to the point where they can't give good advice and can't perform their duties. Before the former chief

medical officer of health resigned, it seemed he had to seek the Health minister's office's permission to give a talk at the University of Alberta about the measles outbreak. At this talk he said, quote: I think there's been a complete failure of leadership at all levels. End quote. Why did this government keep the chief medical officer of health under gag order, unable to spread the truth about the dangers of measles and the safety of vaccines until it was too late?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We had anticipated that the chief medical officer of health was going to extend his contract. He didn't, and that's fine. We wish him well. We had also anticipated that he was going to give the presentation to the university. We're pleased to see that. We'd talked about him doing an op-ed. I'm pleased to see he did that, too. I mean, part of the reason why we have seen success in the year-over-year increase in vaccinations is in part due to the work that he did in getting the message out. We've seen a 66 per cent year-over-year increase. We do also have a microdose available for those aged six months to 12 months, and we hope people will get vaccinated.

2:00

Ms Gray: The question is about the government not doing enough and gag orders being applied on professionals.

Dr. Joffe said that he had to be very careful about what he said. He told the university audience that we have a large population in Alberta who do not have the information they need. He said that among other things the provincial government must spread vaccine information in various faith communities and ensure that there are translations. And he shared that he gave all this same advice to the government a year ago. Why hasn't the government implemented his recommendations? Why did Dr. Joffe have to leave his position in order to say these things in public?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You don't have a 66 per cent year-over-year increase in the amount of measles vaccinations for no reason. You have it because you have a robust communication strategy, and that's what we have.

I invite the members opposite to do as I do every day, sometimes multiple times a day. Type in "Alberta." Type in "measles." You'll be able to get a play-by-play on exactly how many cases there are, how many are active, which zones they are in. There's a helpful link where you can go through and look at where the exposures are. We encourage every person to go through and do that. We're also doing individual social media and localized advertising so people know.

Ms Gray: It's interesting that the Premier is talking about quick, easy access to information when I can't find the word "measles" on the Alberta government website home page. You can read about the province's disastrous budget, you can read about the dismantling of the health care system, you can read about the Premier, but basic public health information is not on alberta.ca, is not highlighted. The government seems very resistant to science and helpful medical advice. Why won't they publish the information in a clear, easy-to-find way and have their new chief medical officer of health do some announcements, speak up during a measles outbreak?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It sounds like the members opposite need somebody to teach them how to use the Google. I'd be happy to show her after we're done session. You open up Google and you type in "Alberta" and you type in "measles," and I bet you

dollars to doughnuts that the very first thing to come up will be a government web page that goes through all of the cases, the ones that are active, where they are by zone with a special link to AHS that shows every single exposure in every single community. We're also doing advertisement in local communities. We're making sure that people have the information they need.

Ms Pancholi: The chief medical officer of health is the physician for all Albertans. It's a role that is meant to be a trusted, independent voice to guide Albertans on public health. But under the UCP Alberta's CMOH, Dr. Mark Joffe, had to resign so that he could speak publicly about the very real risks of measles and the importance of vaccination. Is the dangerous antivaccination movement so powerful within the UCP that silencing and sidelining Dr. Joffe was more important to the Minister of Health than Albertans' public health?

Member LaGrange: Again, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite continue to put out misinformation, I'll put it. They never get tired of being wrong. In fact, the former CMOH – we had been in contract negotiations for some time. We looked forward to an extension. That didn't happen. He chose to follow other pursuits. In fact, we thank the interim CMOH, Dr. Sookram, for stepping up in the short term.

Ms Pancholi: Well, since resigning as CMOH, Dr. Joffe has finally been able to speak out. Last week he spoke about significant populations in Alberta, especially in rural and specific cultural communities, who lack access to accurate vaccine information. Some of the regions most impacted by the current measles outbreak have immunization rates below 30 per cent. He said that we need culturally appropriate communication and translation. These are basic public health tools that should have been common sense during an outbreak, so why was Dr. Joffe not allowed to implement these public health measures while he was chief medical officer of health? Why did he have to quit to advocate for them?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, again, incorrect. The chief medical officer of health had actually spoken to us about making sure that he was going to go out and have these public consultations, these public announcements that he was doing. He did in fact put out a public statement. We spoke even recently about those culturally appropriate conversations. It's all about relationships. What we need are relationships, and that's what our strong public health officials are doing. They're going into those communities, creating relationships, and making change.

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, it is about relationships, and the UCP's relationship is to gag public officials and those who have expertise. As measles continues to spread across the province, Albertans are still battling the same dangerous vaccine misinformation that helped fuel this outbreak in the first place, misinformation that some UCP MLAs have helped spread. Families deserve trusted, independent public health leadership, not political censorship, yet we still have not heard from the new interim chief medical officer of health, Dr. Sunil Sookram, even as measles cases continue to rise. Will the minister drop the gag order on the new CMOH and finally allow Alberta's top public health . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, we are continuing to work with all the local MOHs and the CMOH. They are in constant conversation and consultation with Alberta Health Services as well. We are making sure that the right information gets to the right

people at the right time in a way that they can in fact have those trusting relationships and make change. It's the reason why we have over 66 per cent increase in the number of immunizations for measles since last year. That's a great, positive first step. We are seeing that over 90 per cent of 13-year-olds have two doses; 93 per cent of . . .

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

Investigation of Health Services Procurement (continued)

Ms Hoffman: The Member for Airdrie-Cochrane says that the Premier and Health minister withheld information about the former AHS CEO working with the RCMP and Auditor General to investigate alleged corruption and inappropriate use of public funds. Instead of admitting this, the current Health minister tried to deflect and distract. She's had a week to reflect on the truth and to hear from her constituents, so let's see if she's ready to face the music. Does the current Health minister understand why cabinet should have had all of the information before she asked them to fire the CEO?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll repeat and reiterate what we said last week: that hon. member is mistaken. The committee had all of the information before it to make an educated and informed decision. The termination of the former AHS CEO had nothing to do with the allegations that were put forward by that member but for other reasons, the reasons being that which I've articulated in both the statement of defence multiple times or have referred to them and I've said in this Chamber. There was a complete misalignment with government goals, and that's why she was terminated.

Ms Hoffman: Given that the government's goal appears to be a cover-up and given that the minister clearly thinks it's fine to just withhold information around alleged corruption from her cabinet colleagues and given that the Premier has unreservedly defended the current Health minister even when the truth has been dribbling out, showing very clear lines between MHCare, the Turkish Tylenol boondoggle, and bloated private surgical contracts making the rich richer while patients wait in agony, Mr. Speaker, who's to blame? Was it the Premier who withheld the information, or was it the minister who decided to do it on her own?

Mr. Amery: Once again, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is misinformed. Nothing was withheld from the committee. The statement of defence filed by the government is clear in that the province became aware of a number of different issues relating to the former AHS CEO. The former AHS CEO was conducting an investigation into procurement matters in AHS in the summer of 2024. Unfortunately, that former AHS CEO withheld and concealed that information from government until now.

Ms Hoffman: Given that the former minister says that the cabinet committee didn't have all the information to make good decisions and now the Justice minister decides to blame the CEO that they fired for not giving them more information and given that Albertans deserve transparency about where their money is being spent, who's benefiting, who applied political pressure, and who got kickbacks, bloated contracts, and more and given that there have been members of both sides of this House who have voted for a public inquiry, will the minister, any minister over there – maybe

they're going to lawyer up again – finally admit that it's time for a public inquiry? Stop the stalling. Stop the delay. Stop the excuses.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, it's clear that the hon. member has no faith in the independent offices that are conducting investigations into this matter. On this side of the House we have faith in the integrity of the Auditor General. We have faith in the integrity of the former Chief Justice for Manitoba's provincial court, Justice Wyant, who's conducting a comprehensive investigation into this. As the Premier mentioned just a few minutes ago, we'll await to hear the facts rather than the fiction that the NDP likes to perpetuate, and we'll act on it if need be.

2:10 Agricultural Societies Funding

Mr. van Dijken: Alberta's regional agricultural societies are vital to our rural communities, supporting local fairs, agricultural showcases, and events that strengthen community ties and promote our agrifood industries. In recent years many of these societies have faced financial pressures, struggling to maintain services that rural residents have come to rely on. In Budget 2025 our government made a strategic and community-focused choice by allocating funding to support Alberta's seven regional agricultural societies. To the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation: can you explain why this investment was made and how it will support this long-term stability of these important rural institutions?

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

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Our government understands that regional ag societies are at the heart of rural Alberta, supporting not only agricultural producers but also hosting events and bringing communities together and supporting local economies. In Budget 2025 we made a deliberate choice to invest over \$7.4 million to these seven regional societies. This one-time funding will provide immediate financial stability and help ensure that they remain pillars in their communities for years to come. It's a strategic investment in rural resilience and long-term sustainability.

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

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his response. Given the vital role regional agricultural societies play across Alberta and given that these organizations are not just event planners – they're economic drivers, cultural stewards, and essential partners for farmers, ranchers, and small businesses – to the same minister: can you expand on how this funding will support modernization efforts and help these societies build more sustainable, efficient operating models moving forward?

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

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two point eight seven million dollars is invested annually towards these regional ag societies. It is dedicated specifically to business transformation initiatives. That means helping these societies modernize their operations, improve governance, adopt new technologies, and develop long-term strategic plans. It's not just about keeping the lights on; it's about supporting a sustainable future. This investment was informed by a third-party assessment, and this will help ensure that these ag societies continue to serve Albertans for generations to come.

Mr. van Dijken: Given Alberta's efforts to strengthen its agriculture sector and support rural resilience, it's critical that these

community institutions remain viable and active and given that there are more than 39,000 events hosted annually by ag societies across the province, including exhibitions, 4-H activities, farmers' markets, and community gatherings, to the same minister: how will this funding help ensure that regional agricultural societies can continue to serve as cornerstones of rural Alberta and contribute to the province's broader agricultural and economic development goals?

The Speaker: The minister of agriculture.

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Regional ag societies are more than just event organizers. They're economic engines and social anchors in their communities. This funding ensures that they can continue hosting agricultural exhibitions, doing youth programming, and other vital community events that strengthen the local ag industry and enhance the quality of life in those areas. By stabilizing these institutions now, we're reinforcing the foundation of Alberta and helping build a more competitive, connected, and resilient agricultural sector province-wide.

Provincial Police Agency

Mr. Shepherd: As a former police officer the minister of public safety should know the risks of manufacturing evidence, yet in his pursuit of a provincial police force it seems he's playing fast and loose with the facts, so much so that everyone involved in provincial policing is calling him out. The National Police Federation wrote to express their concern about the UCP's "multi-year and ongoing effort to misrepresent facts, foster . . . fear, and push a narrative to justify" replacing the RCMP. To the minister: if he has evidence his provincial police force will be better and cost less, why is he depending on fake facts, fearmongering, and anger to sell it?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, let's talk about questionable information. Let's talk about facts. The National Police Federation said that there are 3,500 members. I'm not entirely sure the RCMP and K Division are aware of that. The RCMP and K Division tell us there are 1,772 members. Minus the 17 to 20 per cent now we're talking about 1,500 or so members. A year or so ago they told us they had 1,911 members. The people of Alberta, especially in rural Alberta, have a right to know how many police officers are policing their communities, and if they're not going to stand with rural Alberta, we will.

Mr. Shepherd: Given that if you ask who's more credible, the minister with the government that's under investigation for the worst scandal in Alberta's history or officers on the front lines protecting our communities, I know who Albertans trust and given this minister had the gall to stand here in this House and accuse RCMP officers of ignoring 911 calls and leaving Albertans near Peace River unprotected and given their commanding officer had to write him a letter correcting him and calling out, quote, misinformation that may cause unnecessary panic, why is the minister of public safety undermining public safety trying to force through his unwanted provincial police force?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

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

Mr. Ellis: I just want to be clear, Mr. Speaker. The position of the NDP and the position of the RCMP and the position of the union is that chiefs in First Nations communities are lying. That is the

position of the NDP. The Lubicon First Nation chief was very clear to me. He has no police protecting his community. I will take no lessons from the members opposite, and I will trust the First Nations chiefs a hundred per cent.

Mr. Shepherd: Given that a sure sign that you've got a bad plan is when you can't defend it based on the facts and given the RCMP have had to call the minister out for fake facts that, in their words, erode Albertans' sense of safety and security and confidence in officers on the ground in our community and given Alberta sheriffs have had to call him out for building this plan around them without ever talking to them and given rural leaders continue to call them out for refusing to consult with them or provide any actual numbers or costs, it's clear this minister's plan for a provincial police force has about as much support and credibility as the UCP's Alberta pension plan. Will he do the right thing, listen to Albertans, and stop trying to force this through?

Mr. Ellis: Good question, Mr. Speaker. What are the facts? Are there 3,500 police officers, or are there 772 police officers? Are there 1,911 police officers? I can tell you right now that the people of Alberta have a right to know how many police officers are protecting their communities right now, and that's what we're doing under Bill 49. We're going to have an independent police service, and we're going to make sure that when 911 calls are happening somebody is attending that call, and we're going to continue to support rural Alberta even if the NDP won't. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

AISH Client Benefits

Ms Renaud: The minister of social services regularly says: AISH at \$1,901 a month is a generous disability benefit; it's the most generous in the country. That's disinformation, Mr. Speaker. Other provinces have things like housing benefits attached, and even if it was the highest, it's legislated poverty. Even if the minister's proclamations were true, saying that \$1,900 to live on per month for a severely disabled Albertan is as out of touch and entitled as this government. Cost of living is higher for severely disabled Albertans, so why will this government not let them just keep the new \$200 federal benefit?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, very, very simple: we're \$554 higher than Manitoba, \$533 higher than Ontario, \$515 higher than Saskatchewan, \$417 higher than B.C., and we're higher than Quebec. We're going to continue to have the highest benefit anywhere in the country. That's what we're committed to, and I'm proud to be part of the only government that has ever spent even one penny on indexing AISH, unlike the opposition, who spent zero dollars on the indexation.

Ms Renaud: Given there's potential for this corrupt and incompetent government to claw back from severely disabled AISH recipients up to \$15 million a month or \$180 million a year and given we understand it costs money to investigate Bigfoot, pay off your friends with rich appointments to panels, not to mention bloated contracts with private contractors, my question to the minister is: what is the ministry planning on doing with the \$180 million per year that you're clawing back from severely disabled Albertans? What are you going to do to make life better?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we're not clawing back anything when it comes to people who are receiving AISH benefits. We have \$1,901.

It's the law. We're going to continue to make sure that that continues to be the amount that we give people on AISH. In addition to that, we also give \$400 worth of medical benefits, as another example, all part of the \$3.6 billion that this government and Alberta taxpayers invest in the disability community each and every year because that's how important we believe this issue is. That's why we invest that amount. That's why we're going to continue to, and we're proud to be the highest anywhere in the country.

Ms Renaud: Given that, Mr. Speaker, it never fails to astonish me that this government proudly stands and says that disabled people living on under \$23,000 a year is sufficient – the keywords here are “severely disabled” – and given that they're funding food banks because the usage has gone up, given that they acknowledge there's a lack of affordable, accessible housing and given that their own advocate says that disabled people live in deep poverty and they need help, what are you doing to make life better for disabled Albertans?

2:20

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you what we're doing. We're continuing to fix the NDP mess that that member and the former government made when it comes to things like housing, where they made zero new houses the entire time that they were in government. In my time as minister I have over 5,000 new houses just on the affordable housing side; on the market side, the most anywhere in the country, tens of thousands . . .

Ms Renaud: You should be ashamed of yourself.

Mr. Nixon: . . . another 5,000-plus more in affordable housing units . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Mr. Nixon: . . . on its way right now; and the only government in history to actually spend money on indexing AISH. It's great to hear the members finally stand up and support all the work . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

A point of order is noted at 2:20.

Road Construction in Grande Prairie-Wapiti

Mr. Wiebe: Mr. Speaker, Grande Prairie is one of the most agriculture- and resource-rich areas in Alberta, holding a significant share of Canada's timber and energy reserves. These assets drive our economy, put food on the table, and build our communities, but natural resources mean little without infrastructure to move them. Highways, pipelines, and trade corridors are essential to get our products to national and international markets. To the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors: what is our government doing to enhance transportation infrastructure and unlock the economic potential of the Grande Prairie region?

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

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government actually invested \$227 million toward completing the twinning of highway 40 just south of Grande Prairie. Phase 1 from Grande Prairie to the Wapiti River was actually completed after the last provincial election, when Albertans rejected the NDP and voted in the UCP government, just this last election. Phase 2, the Wapiti

River to township road 700, is anticipated to be completed this fall. This is an important economic corridor in this province. It's important to northern Albertans, and we're going to get this project done.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that the Grande Prairie region is a vital economic hub, serving as a trade centre for over 280,000 people, and given that highways 40 and 43 support substantial industrial and commercial activity while also serving as a crucial transportation corridor connecting Alberta and British Columbia, to the same minister: could you please update the Assembly on the progress of land acquisition for the highway 40X project?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Land acquisition for highway 40X is well under way. The functional planning for highway 40X is now complete, and we are now prioritizing the utility co-ordination as well as the detailed engineering. These steps are essential so it can be construction ready by 2026. Budget '25 has \$14.5 million invested so that this work can be done and we can build this important artery for northern Alberta and for the people of Grande Prairie.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that functional planning for this project was completed back in 2010 and further given that the proposed southwest bypass will significantly improve transportation efficiency and road safety by redirecting approximately 3,000 heavy trucks each day out of the city of Grande Prairie and our residential neighbourhoods and pedestrian pathways, can the same minister please update the Assembly on what actions the government is currently taking on this project and when we can expect to see construction to begin on the highway 40X connector?

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, Mr. Speaker, we'll be able to see smoke and dust and construction actually happen by next year. We will continue to focus on making sure that Alberta is a safe place to raise a family and a successful place to work and run a business. But do you know what are the headwinds that we Albertans face? It is the NDP-Liberal coalition in Ottawa and here in Alberta. Today is the federal election day, so I'd encourage everyone to get out and vote. Vote for a change, vote for a stronger Alberta in Canada, and make sure that this is the best place in Canada to live, work, and raise a family.

Bill 210

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, Alberta workers deserve to keep the tips they earn, but right now there is no protection stopping owners or managers from taking a share of that money. Tips are not a bonus for management or for the owners to pad their bottom line; they are wages earned by the front-line staff. Will the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade support our Bill 210 to protect workers' tips and ensure the money left for servers stays with the workers who actually earned it?

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

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would certainly support the exploration of additional guidelines and protections around tipping.

The bill in question does have some issues, the first of which is that there was not extensive consultation done with the recipients of tips and also the many employers who are engaged in tipping industries. Again, this is an area that the Alberta government is happy to look at, and we're also evaluating what's happening in other provinces and territories that have recently amended their legislation. We're happy to go from there.

Member Ceci: Given that I can tell the minister that the workers who earn tips want those tips – we don't need to consult – and given that Albertans are facing skyrocketing costs from groceries to rent to utilities and that workers in the service sector are amongst the hardest hit and given that tips are not a luxury for these workers, but they allow many people to pay for their food, housing, basic necessities, how can the government refuse to protect workers' tips when they know that without action many Albertans will continue to have their hard-earned money taken from them during the worst affordability crisis in a generation?

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, again, the Alberta government is willing to look into this, into how to approach this issue. The bill in question also doesn't define, for example, how tips will be monitored, what kind of record keeping is expected, what kind of enforcement. Again, I understand the intent . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

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

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It doesn't answer questions like: what happens if an employee refuses to enter into a tipping pool? What happens if they leave a tipping pool? It excludes owners. What percentage of ownership would justify the exclusion from a tipping pool? These are all questions that the NDP did not answer because they didn't consult. We've got to do it right.

Member Ceci: Given that that could be put into Judge Wyant's criteria – maybe you can look at that, too – and given that Alberta has the lowest minimum wage in the entire country and given that most of these workers haven't seen their wages increase by a single penny since the minimum wage was raised in 2018 by the NDP government and given that many service workers now rely on tips just to survive because this government refuses to address minimum wages – we all know that – will the minister admit that the government is content on ignoring the struggles of service workers?

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, the lowest wages in Alberta were under the NDP government when they chased billions of dollars of investment out of this province and cost us tens of thousands of jobs. In terms of the minimum wage, again, it's important to do the work before recommending major policy changes. The majority of minimum wage earners are youth, 15 to 24. They're experiencing high levels of unemployment across the country. We want to make sure they get their first jobs, they get that experience so that they can build their careers, build on their education, and participate in the greatest economy in Canada, earning the highest wages with the lowest taxes. That's what we're going to do.

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

Energy Development and Environmental Policies

Mr. Lundy: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past several weeks Albertans have witnessed a confusing trend in the Alberta NDP ranks when it comes to their loyalties in the federal election. Some former NDP MLAs like Shannon Phillips and Rod Loyola,

until he was dropped, have endorsed the Trudeau-Carney Liberals, the same Liberals who cancelled Northern Gateway, adopted the no-more-pipelines act, and are trying to cripple Alberta's energy sector. Meanwhile former NDP leader Rachel Notley is endorsing Jagmeet Singh and the socialist NDP. To the Minister of Energy and Minerals: what is Alberta's government doing to support the development of our natural resources despite opposition from the NDP and their federal allies?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, one thing we're not doing is protesting pipelines. We're actually making it clear to Canada and the world that there is a business case for oil and gas in this province.

2:30

We know that we can do a lot to solve the world's issue with energy security. The NDP stand against that. We know that we can do a lot to help the world with energy poverty, yet the NDP stand against that, Mr. Speaker. I don't even know where the NDP are. Maybe No-show Nenshi and Naughty Notley are out avoiding litigation challenges. The truth is that the world has changed. Greenpeace had a \$1 billion lawsuit against it for protesters. Maybe that's where Notley and No-show Nenshi are right now.

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

Mr. Lundy: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that our government continues to fight back against the harmful impacts of federal Liberal and NDP policies and further given that No-show Nenshi's Liberal-NDP coalition caucus simply refuses to stand up for Alberta's interests, again to the Minister of Energy and Minerals: how is Alberta's government ensuring our energy sector continues to grow and attract investment in the face of increasing political hostility from Alberta's NDP and their antienergy allies?

Mr. Jean: Well, Mr. Speaker, the first thing we do is that we look at what the NDP plan is and then we pretty much do exactly the opposite. The truth is that we're doing whatever we can to grow our industry, to make sure that we bring great jobs into Alberta. Good jobs are as a result of the oil industry. Our Premier has called for an ambitious goal of doubling production, and that's what we're doing. We're talking to all the pipeline companies. We're letting them know: please improve efficiency, increase egress, look at opportunities to reinvest. We're asking oil and gas companies and producers to increase their capital investments. Now is the time. We're doing everything we can to create a better Alberta.

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

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the names don't matter when the ideology is broken, whether it's Notley, Nenshi, Trudeau, Singh, or Carney, the common thread is the opposition to Alberta's critical energy sector and further given that the United Conservatives are pushing back against these attacks on our economy, including a potential job-killing oil and gas production cap, to the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas: can you please tell this House how Alberta will continue to push back against the left's reckless eco radical agenda?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite and their activist base have absolutely zero credibility when it comes to environmental policy. That is because it never was designed to be an environmental policy. It was policy designed to

shut in and shut down our major industries and bring in a carbon tax to punish Albertans while they stood in lockstep with their masters in Ottawa.

We have an environmental record to be proud of, Mr. Speaker. That's why countries around the world are coming to us for more responsibly produced energy. We'll continue to defend that sector.

Occupational Health and Safety

Ms Wright: Mr. Speaker, on this Day of Mourning we commemorate the 203 workers who lost their lives because of their jobs, a terrible increase over 2024 and an all-time high. Workplace injuries and deaths are preventable with proper legislation, training, and work-site safety protocols, but on this government's watch protection for workers has been rolled back, enforcement reactive, not proactive, changes made behind closed doors. When can workers expect this UCP government to do things right, strengthen instead of weaken the OHS Code so that workers are protected and safer and make it home?

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to ensuring our province remains the best place to live, work, invest, and raise a family, and that includes our focus on health and safety as we work to see workers return home to their families at the end of each day. To do that, we provide support on injury prevention, safety education, awareness, and best practices. We've added OHS officers and investigators, and we transparently published information on occupational illnesses, injuries, and fatalities to learn from them. We also regularly update the OHS Code in collaboration with experts and industry. Despite what the member opposite said, we appreciate the experts' efforts in enhancing our code.

Ms Wright: Given that this UCP government seems determined to chip away at worker safety and health in the name of red tape reduction, given that continued restrictions on workers' ability to refuse unsafe work have led to a weakening of retaliation safeguards, given that workers' safety priorities are often different than employers', given that joint health and safety committee responsibilities have been watered down, requirements for workers to participate in safety inspections eliminated, and employee voices muted – Mr. Speaker, workers' lives are not red tape – when can workers expect these protections will be restored?

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government continues to review and update the Occupational Health and Safety Code. The latest amendments to the OHS Code took place on December 4, 2024, and must have been complied with by March 30 of this year. The changes received overwhelming support from stakeholders who helped to develop them. These changes dealt with harassment and violence, explosives, and oil and gas wells, along with administrative changes to correct errors and align standards. Like everything we do, our changes reflect extensive stakeholder engagements from our valued industry partners. We share the goals of the members opposite and of industry and of workers to get home safely at the end of the day.

Ms Wright: Given that this year's focus is Invisible Injuries: Not Part of the Job, given that Alberta's mental health crisis is acute, given that workers often feel shame and underreport, given Alberta's presumptive coverage for psychological injury is flawed as it limits coverage to first responders, correctional officers, emergency dispatchers, and now nurses but neglects many others who are also exposed to similar levels of trauma, given that psychological injury because of work happens through all sectors,

when will Alberta restore presumptive psychological injury coverage to all injured workers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad that the member opposite highlighted an initiative that I'm bringing forward, which is a proposal to extend psychological injury presumptions to registered nurses and registered psychiatric nurses. Alberta's government will base decisions on scientific evidence and linkages between occupations, including nursing, and psychological hazards. When it comes to the health and safety of workers, our work is never done, and one death is too many, so we're happy to work with the members opposite if they have constructive feedback on how we can make things better and make work environments safer. We'll, of course, act on those.

Provincial Response to U.S. Tariffs

Mr. Ellingson: In November 2023 Dow Chemical announced their Path2Zero project. More recently the Premier proclaimed President Trump's tariffs and subsequent global trade war as a big win for Alberta. Last week we learned that Trump's tariffs have resulted in the Path2Zero project being placed on hold. Is the Premier ready to admit that her reception circuit in the United States has not been to the benefit of Albertans?

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to report that the Dow project continues, and they're expecting to spend \$2.5 billion over the next year, employing Albertans in the process. There are a thousand workers on-site today, and that's the result of the intentional effort of this government, this Premier to make Alberta the best place in the country to invest. I would also highlight the success of the Premier's advocacy in the United States. I was just in three states last week. Glowing reviews from the Americans, but also glowing reviews from industry and workers in Alberta.

Mr. Ellingson: Given that the project was estimated to inject \$8.8 billion in capital investment into Alberta's economy, given that it was anticipated to reach 5,000 to 6,000 construction projects over an 18- to 24-month period – would have been this year; now no longer – given that hundreds more permanent operating jobs would have been created, when will the Premier join Team Canada in supporting Albertans and Alberta projects through these uncertain times, or will we just hear more rhetoric?

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, Alberta has been a proud partner with Team Canada during this challenging situation with our closest ally and trading partner in the United States. We're doing that through mutual recognition pilots in trucking to make trucking more seamless across the country. We're doing this through a mutual recognition in consumer goods so that goods recognized in any province or territory can be sold and utilized in another. We're co-leading the finalization of the financial services chapter of the Canadian free trade agreement with Ontario, and we're unilaterally looking to remove any other internal barriers to trade that exist within Alberta. We led in 2019. We're going to lead now.

Mr. Ellingson: Given that, despite this rhetoric, Alberta experienced the most job losses in the country in March, given that the loss of this project will send ripple effects through Alberta's economy, given that the 2025 budget included no economic plan to create jobs or boost prosperity for Albertans, why is this government not focused on creating the economic conditions to

create jobs, bring lasting investment like the Dow Chemical petrochemical project would have done?

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, despite the member opposite's characterization, the project continues, and, again, they're spending 2 and a half billion dollars, and there are a thousand workers on-site.

Another thing I'd like to point out is that during this government's term Alberta represented 90 per cent of the private-sector jobs created in Canada over a six-month period. Over a 12-month period Alberta was the only province to create more private-sector employment than public. We will take no lessons from the only one-term government in Alberta's history, that chased billions of dollars of investment and tens of thousands of jobs out of this province, calling us embarrassing, telling us to get jobs in other provinces. Shame on you.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Health Care Professionals in Rural Alberta

Mr. Dyck: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every Albertan is equally important, with almost 20 per cent living in rural areas, yet a disproportionately low number of doctors are available to serve our communities and meet rural demand. Last year our government announced a \$164 million investment to establish rural medical training centres in both Lethbridge and Grande Prairie. This investment demonstrates our government's commitment to hard-working rural Albertans, and this fall this new doctor training will be starting in Grande Prairie. To the Minister of Advanced Education: could you please outline how this program will help retain doctors in rural Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to take a moment to commend the member for his incredible advocacy for the residents of Grande Prairie. I know he's a fantastic MLA for his neighbours and residents, and I just want to commend him on his amazing work.

Mr. Speaker, we know that medical students who train in our rural communities are more likely to stay and practise in their communities if they have the opportunity to receive that education at home, and that's precisely what our government is working towards. As he mentioned, we are working to invest in additional training centres in Grande Prairie and in Lethbridge so that we can train more medical professionals in those communities and ensure that they stay in those communities to build the relevant workforce that's needed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. Now, given that this new doctor training centre is specifically designed to train doctors in the north to serve the north and given that rural communities account for nearly 20 per cent of Alberta's total population and further given that all hard-working Albertans, regardless of where they live, deserve equal access to health care, can the Minister of Health inform this House of any strategies or incentives in place to ensure that graduates of the new doctor training program remain in the north rather than relocating to urban centres?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. In fact, we have many strategies, but one in particular that I want to highlight is the rural, remote family medicine resident physician bursary pilot program. It's a bit of a mouthful. In fact, what it does is that it provides \$16 million over two years to medical residents who want to commit to practising comprehensive care in our rural and remote communities for three years upon the completion of their training. I'm hearing great things from those medical residents that are really looking forward to that program.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that relying solely on locally trained doctors will not meet the growing demand of our health care system and given that Alberta should be the destination that attracts world-class talent from around the world and further given that numerous foreign-trained doctors from countries such as England, Ireland, Australia, the United States, Hong Kong, India, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Pakistan possess exceptional qualifications, can the Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism please explain how the Foreign Credential Advisory Committee is streamlining the process so that these doctors can practise in Alberta and get to work?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's new Foreign Credential Advisory Committee, launched in June 2024, is working to streamline recognition for internationally trained professionals. Made up of experts from industry, regulators, and newcomers themselves, the committee will recommend faster, fairer processes to get skilled doctors working in Alberta. The final report is expected by the end of June 2025, helping us address labour shortages and attract top talent from the world in this province.

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)

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

Political Discourse

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As today is election day, I'd like to note that the ability to forgive is a heroically noble yet extremely difficult trait. Surely, everyone in this Chamber, including myself, knows the difficulty of forgiving others. Ephesians 4:31-32 states: "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

In recent years all over the world we've seen an unhealthy and unproductive toxic shift in our politics towards division with seemingly no desire to find common ground. This is wrong, Mr. Speaker. Many people, particularly in the last five years, have been wronged and are angry about it. Though anger at times may feel righteous, it simply acts as a cancer on the soul, often predominantly on those who were wronged in the first place. In many cases of conflict where proper discourse, conversation,

and diplomacy would have potentially calmed things, people have refused any dialogue, making things worse.

Whether you're in opposition or in the government, you wake up and come to work to try to do your best to make Alberta a better place . . .

Some members believe there's one path to accomplish that, and other members believe [there's] an entirely different path. But we all share

in a common good, and for these reasons we have an intrinsic desire to make Alberta the best place in the entire world.

If those words sound familiar, Mr. Speaker, they should. They came from an outstanding man, yourself.

As we move forward, I encourage everyone to get out and vote, and if they have not done so, I encourage them to do so. I thank everyone who's already cast their ballots, and I extend from this side of the House our best wishes to our good friends in the federal government of Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has a statement to make.

National Day of Mourning

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today throughout Alberta workers gathered to mark the Day of Mourning, a day to honour those workers who lost their lives because of their jobs. To hear those names read out loud, all 203, such a terrible increase from last year, was incredibly moving and a reminder of a shared responsibility to prevent future tragedies by making sure that safer working environments are a priority.

But when thousands more suffered work-related illness and injury, we know that this year is also a stark reminder that this government has failed at living that responsibility. Regulations that protect workers are only as good as their enforcement, depth, and responsiveness, and when a government like this UCP government is overly focused on removing red tape, workers suffer. For all those injured or ill it's more difficult now to appeal WCB decisions. Joint health and safety committees that made sure workers' voices were meaningfully heard have been gutted. Circumstances under which employees can refuse unsafe work have been narrowed and protection for retaliation lessened.

Today is about honouring, but it's also about this year's theme, Invisible Injuries: Not Part of the Job. Safety means physical safety but psychological safety, too. But people feel shame, and we know they underreport. This means that governments, including this one, need to carefully consider their choices.

Alberta's workers deserve stronger, better regulations and enforcement, a willingness to uphold the Westray decision, joint health and safety committee members who receive the appropriate hours of training and education to make sure folks understand the toll psychological injuries take and that those injuries could be as a result of one single incident or a series. Change could mean presumptive coverage for all firefighters and for workers who suffer a psychological injury to make sure no one is placed in a burdensome situation.

To those who have been injured by an accident or other workplace hazards, we stand with you. To those who have lost loved ones, we mourn with you and vow to be vigilant to fight and to honour them. Albertans deserve no less.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the deputy chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills, I am pleased to present the committee's final report on Bill Pr. 5, Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, and Bill Pr. 6, Burman University Amendment Act, 2025, sponsored by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka. These bills were referred to the committee on March 27, 2025. The report recommends that Bill Pr. 5 proceed and that Bill Pr. 6 proceed with amendments. I request concurrence from the Assembly in the final report on bills Pr. 5 and Pr. 6.

[Motion for concurrence carried]

2:50 Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill 54, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, sponsored by the Minister of Justice.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? Oh, my goodness. It's like Whac-A-Mole at the fair. The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a *National Post* article titled Canada's Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Decade. The Numbers Prove It. I think it's a great read.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table an article from the St. Albert *Gazette* titled Mayor Frustrated by GOA Move to Axe Conduct Codes.

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

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first is Ministerial Order 808/2025, signed on January 30, 2025, in which the Minister of Health dismissed all AHS board members and appointed her deputy minister Andre Tremblay as official administrator.

The second is volume 2, section 4, of my April 25, 2025, submission to the Auditor General, which includes a short write-up and a screenshot of a leaked memo e-mail to cabinet February 13 containing five recommendations I made to cabinet on February 11.

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of a letter from the National Disability Network dated April 25 addressed to the Premier and the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services urging them to leave the disability benefit alone and addressing the cost of \$200 to \$300 per applicant for the disability tax credit.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a letter from Rob Hill, the deputy commissioner commanding

officer of the Alberta RCMP, written to the minister of public safety to correct the record with respect to some colourful information the minister presented during second reading of Bill 49.

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

Member Miyashiro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite number of copies to table a letter by a Lethbridge resident published in the *Lethbridge Herald* on April 25 titled It's Clear the UCP Doesn't Have the Best Interests of Albertans at Heart. The gist of the letter is that the truth about the UCP's record on electricity diverges wildly from the Member for Lethbridge-East's talking points.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I do have a tabling. I almost forgot. I have the five requisite copies of the arrangement of *O Canada* that was sung earlier today and composed by a member of both the chorus and here today, Mr. Stuart Beach.

Hon. members, that brings us to points of order. At 2:16 the Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Mr. Williams: We'll withdraw that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

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

At 2:21 the hon. the Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, as you suggested, at 2:20 we rose on a point of order. The Member for St. Albert was heckling from a sedentary position while the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services was answering his third question of the set from that member, where the member from a sedentary position shouted: you should be ashamed of yourself. This is out of order. Naturally, it's unparliamentary. You yourself ruled to this effect on May 8 in this Chamber along with a dozen other references, referring to: you should be ashamed, shameful, et cetera. We understand things can get out of control. It happens to all members. We ask that the member apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As House leader for the Official Opposition I rise just to respond with some comments on this particular point of order. Specifically, I feel the need to note that at the time noted, the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services was responding to questions from the Official Opposition and made a couple of statements that I feel I must highlight for the record. He said along the lines of, quote, the NDP government spent zero pennies indexing AISH. He also then said, quote, that he's part of the only government in history to spend money indexing AISH. Both of these are factually not true.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I do not rise to continue debate. I rise specifically because a minister misleading this Assembly and providing inaccurate information can rise to the level of the contempt of this Assembly. One of the challenges that that has is that an offence against the dignity of the House can obstruct or impede the House and in this case inflamed this House such that a point of order has been raised, which I think has obstructed our ability to operate.

I did not hear whether the member heckled what she did or did not, but I do want to flag to the Speaker and to the Government

House Leader that I will be reaching out to him to have a conversation about what this minister continues to do in misleading and putting inaccurate information onto the public record. I do not raise a point of privilege at this point, Mr. Speaker, but I am very concerned about the pattern of behaviour. I think in this particular case it did cause a disruption in this House as it inflamed the temperature of the Chamber.

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

Ms Renaud: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The House leader is correct. I should have said that the government should be ashamed of themselves. So I do apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: I appreciate the apology.

I think it's incumbent upon the Speaker to remind the Leader of the Official Opposition that saying you don't rise to continue to debate doesn't mean that you're not rising to continue to debate. I think what we saw was a very clear departure from a discussion around the point of order, and while I appreciate you were displeased with the conduct of the minister, I encourage you to call a point of order at the time of the offence, not take the opportunity that's provided to you because of other parliamentary circumstances to make a point at some great length that, quite frankly, had nothing to do with the point of order before the Assembly. Not to say that there's no validity to your comments although I would reserve absolute judgment for that for a later time. If you'd like to have a discussion with me, I'd be pleased to do that.

I accept the apology. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

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

Bill 210

Employment Standards (Protecting Workers' Tips) Amendment Act, 2024

[Debate adjourned April 14: Mr. Jones speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade was speaking at adjournment and has three minutes remaining left in his time should he choose to use it. The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade has three minutes.

Mr. Jones: He shall, Mr. Speaker.

The bill also calls for rules on tip sharing between employers and employees who do similar work but never defines what similar actually means. What percentage of an employee's time needs to be spent serving to be a server, busing to be a busser? Over what time period do we measure this? Who measures it? What happens if there is a disagreement on what work is similar? What if the nature of the business changes? Postpandemic many restaurant business models changed from majority dine in to now majority takeout. The current system enables the flexibility for tipping structures to nimbly adapt to changes in business reality. That kind of ambiguity invites confusion and potential conflict and risks creating unnecessary and potentially harmful hierarchies and divisions within cohesive teams.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

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 there are minority owners with a small ownership stake but otherwise performing similar work? Aren't they 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 in tip pools, and I don't recommend that Alberta becomes the first. Even setting morale and workplace culture aside for a moment, we must consider: would this bill even be enforceable if implemented? 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.

3:00

Mr. Speaker, Bill 210 also doesn't address monitoring or enforcement. How do we enforce this? Who keeps records and for how long? How would a worker dispute or recover lost tips? Alberta also already has laws protecting worker tips that are enforceable. While tips are not currently addressed in employment standards laws, they are protected under personal property and criminal laws once distributed to employees. Theft is covered by the Criminal Code of Canada. Our government agrees that tip theft is unacceptable. Allegations of tip theft, including through electronic payments, can already be reported to law enforcement agencies and enforced through existing laws.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the intent behind Bill 210, but changes this significant need to be informed by the workers and small and medium businesses and entrepreneurs that would be affected by them. This has the potential to impact worker-to-worker relations, relations between workers and their employers and business owners, and it has the potential to create significant reporting requirements and additional costs. At this time we are continuing to monitor legislation in other jurisdictions. We welcome feedback from workers and businesses, and we'll continue to explore this initiative.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to speak? I will recognize the Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak about my support for Bill 210. You know, in a past life I worked as a musician, which is to say that I did not make a lot of money as a musician. In working as a musician, I also spent about a decade working in the service industry. I had a chance to work at a wide variety of restaurants. Started out on the *Edmonton Queen* riverboat, moved up to Joey Tomatoes, moved from there to a new bar downtown called Overtime, the Iron Bridge, Vons steak and fish house, the Blue Chair cafe. I had a chance to work in a number of excellent establishments here in Edmonton. It was wonderful work for me.

A lot of folks in the arts community actually do take work in restaurants, even folks that are doing very well working full-time, doing lots of gigs, professional theatre artists, musicians, et cetera, because it's good to have that backstop. Of course, when you're working as an artist, generally you're working as a sole proprietor, individual contractor. We all know that work can be seasonal, so having that dependable restaurant gig, where the hours are flexible, where you're working on the same kind of clock – generally you're

working late nights at the restaurant, just like you work evenings and late nights in the arts industry. It's easy to swap shifts and get time off when you need to, and it's very portable. You can move anywhere. You can pick up work. It's a very easy thing to do. And, of course, you can make good money quickly thanks to tips.

Indeed, yeah, it was a wonderful way for me to be able to sort of keep the bills paid while I was pursuing my work in music because I could go in and, hey, I could make a few hundred dollars in tips on a good night. Certainly, Mr. Speaker, I was not working in that industry for the wage. I never made more than minimum wage in the restaurant industry. Those cheques were pretty paltry, but it was the tips that allowed me to be able to continue and pursue a lot of other things.

Now, I was pretty fortunate. In my time working in the places that I worked at, I generally received all of my tips directly, whether that was cash on the table or whether that was the credit card coming to me and I was putting it through in the system, and then I was printing off my sheet at the end of the night that showed exactly what I took in in tips. There was no third party. There was no intermediary that could intercept the dollars that were left for me by the customers I served. Let's be absolutely clear, Mr. Speaker. That is the expectation when we go out to eat, when I go to the coffee shop, when I go to get my beard trimmed, that when I leave that tip, it is going to the person that provided the service.

Now, of course, we did at one restaurant, I recall, have a manager that required us to tip him out for the help he provided co-ordinating food at the pass-through and that. There was debate amongst the servers as to how much help he actually provided. But, you know, he was in that tip pool; he got 1 per cent.

Now that has shifted, Mr. Speaker. That has changed in the industry. It is far, far less common now that you get cash on the table. I know myself that I have not carried cash since early in the pandemic. Far more often now we are being asked to tip at the till on a system where the server themselves or the individual providing the service is not co-ordinating and tracking, so it is out of the hands of the person. But there is still that expectation amongst the public, and if you talk to people, they will be quite emphatic about this, that if they are leaving a tip, that tip should be going to the employee. It is not there to make up part of the employee's wage. That's owed by the employer. It is not there to pay the employer or to off-set other costs. It is money for the person providing the service.

Now, that is exactly what Bill 210 is meant to address. It's enacting legislation simply to ensure that workers get to keep their tips. It's just the right thing to do. It is the honest thing to do. It is what the public expects. Seven other provinces already do this, Mr. Speaker: B.C., Ontario, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, P.E.I., Newfoundland, and Quebec. Certainly, the members across the aisle like to talk about how much more they want Alberta to act like Quebec. Here's an opportunity. We could do that and actually support Alberta workers.

Now, the minister just stood and essentially continued his argument that somehow doing this simple thing to ensure that when a tip is left for a worker, the worker keeps that tip is too complicated, too hard to implement, too many unanswered questions. Let's be clear, Mr. Speaker. This is a government that introduces sweeping numbers of massive framework legislation that leaves significant details to the regulation. They constantly do this on matters of massive import to Albertans, but the minister of jobs is standing here and saying that, well, no, we couldn't possibly pass the legislation and then implement regulations to address his concerns. He couldn't possibly actually do a little bit of work and bring in amendments to address his concerns. He says: no, we have to throw the baby out with the bathwater. He can't lift a finger to help Alberta workers.

Let's be clear, Mr. Speaker. This isn't a government that's afraid of taking on complex challenges or, frankly, imposing new systems, massive bureaucracy, red tape when it suits their political interests. Just look at the reorganization of the entirety of the health care system. Entire departments we've heard reports of that have been essentially frozen in terms of being able to hire, buy basic resources, take simple actions while they are rearranging the entire system from top to bottom because the Premier is angry at AHS. They're willing to do that. They're willing to create an entire new provincial police force, unknown numbers of millions of dollars, because they have a grudge against the RCMP in Ottawa.

They don't care about how much disruption that causes and all the headaches it's causing for municipal leaders, that they don't talk to, or even the Alberta sheriffs, that they won't consult with. They're happy to require every municipality to get a review of every grant they want to receive from the federal government. They're happy to introduce a sweeping ban on renewables and now regulations that make it incredibly difficult to actually launch any renewable project in Alberta, but it is too much trouble to ensure that workers who are dependent on their tips at a time of the highest inflation we have seen in ages, Alberta having the highest rate of inflation in Canada, get to keep their tips. It's implausible, Mr. Speaker.

This government is happy to recreate whole new regulatory systems, complexity when it suits their interests. When it would actually help Albertans – and let's be clear. This is not complex regulation, Mr. Speaker. This is not red tape. It's a simple thing. When a worker gets a tip, they get to keep that tip. Are there small things we need to iron out and talk about to make sure that we're not leaving anybody out? Sure. Are we all grown-ups who can figure out this kind of thing? Yes, we are, except, it seems, the minister of jobs.

Of course, we've seen this government time and time again show that they have very little regard for working Albertans. Just look at the chaos they have caused for health care workers across this province with their rearrangement of the entire health care system. Just look at the fact that they refused to consult with Alberta sheriffs on creating an Alberta provincial police force. Look at what we've gone through with teachers and educational assistants with this government. But the fact is that as much as they like to claim that they do things to make life for Albertans, generally they only do things when they feel it's going to be better for them and their political interests.

Just look at the utility rebates, Mr. Speaker, which they introduced after allowing the price of electricity and natural gas to soar in Alberta to untold levels. They finally came out with a basic rebate, and then they left out a huge swath of Albertans because – familiar – it was too complicated to ensure that people that lived in some apartments and condominiums, a lot of people in my constituency, were able to access that. At first they said: oh, we're going to figure it out. Then eventually – you know what? – they didn't even bother because it was more about them trying to improve their electoral prospects than actually trying to help Albertans.

3:10

The fact is that under this UCP government Albertans have seen some of the highest inflation growth in Canada while wages have largely been stagnant, particularly for workers who rely on tips. You know, this is a government that claims that they stand for individual rights, that they believe Albertans should be able to keep the money they earned, but they refuse to lift a finger to do the little bit of work it would take to implement Bill 210. They spend a lot of time talking about how they feel the federal government, heck,

the rest of our country are exploiting Alberta, unfairly taking and redistributing the dollars Albertans earn, but in this piece, that is directly within their control, they are not willing to protect the wages, the tips received by working Albertans. It's disappointing, Mr. Speaker, but, unfortunately, not surprising.

But I can tell you that I support Bill 210. The Alberta Hospitality Association came out today, and they support Bill 210. We depend on these workers to keep our economy moving, Mr. Speaker. But time and time again we see this is not a government that's interested in supporting workers. They're interested in supporting massive corporations. They're interested in supporting their friends and close relations but not workers.

The Acting Speaker: Any others wishing to speak? I recognize the Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in this House to speak to private member's Bill 210, Employment Standards (Protecting Workers' Tips) Amendment Act, 2024. Before I say anything, I just wanted to actually thank my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-Mill Woods, our Opposition House Leader, for bringing this piece of legislation forward in this House because this has been in discussion for the past almost six years, since the Kenney government came in.

I remember when the newly formed government in their moves and their actions opened season on, you know, Alberta workers, mostly, like, vulnerable workers that are working on the minimum wage. I remember all those years when youth workers' wages were rolled back, and I remember Jason Kenney's campaign – when the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre, my colleague, was speaking in that context, a number of things came into my mind like movies – when Jason Kenney made a comment in response to a question to the women and the workers of the hospitality industry's role as the moderate human capital of our industry.

When the minister was making his comments in response to my colleague's debate – and that reminded of those set-ups, mindsets, ideological moves. No positive comments coming from the other side, unfortunately. Their mindset is still stuck there, so we cannot probably expect much. You can show them as much as you want to show. They can claim that even their own colleagues from our neighbouring provinces like Saskatchewan – they need to remember that, like, both sides of our province, left and right, B.C. and Saskatchewan, have legislated this. Those people in my riding, in my community: I talk to most of those people. You know, we all go to those shops, restaurants, barbershops, gas stations.

You can name a number of things where you leave tips for specifically communicating and receiving a service and showing, you know – how would I say? – the expression of the greatness the person has to provide you service there, doing their job. In many aspects sometimes we see that we are in that kind of an environment. The other times we see the person working there and that individual and the conditions they are working in and maybe the individual's background. A lot of newcomers, you know, immigrant people work in that industry as well.

Hearing about this, not only me as a member of this Legislature but when most of Albertans tip somebody for their job and what they do, they do it with only one understanding, that this individual is going to keep it and this is going to help this particular individual to go home and make their ends meet or do whatever they aim to. A number of those youth workers probably save to go to the postsecondaries. A number of those people take even, you know, breaks. They don't go to high-paid jobs; they take a break from their studies to work six months, save money for their postsecondary,

and then go back to school. Seeing this, they don't have protection, and it is not justice with them.

The majority of the industry – there are a number of surveys. I can, you know, name it here. I know the government House members and the ministry also have the same information. The survey shows that, like, 54 per cent of the industry members wanted to see a regulation around this. Maybe that is why not only one province; seven provinces in this country have legislated this act to protect workers' tips and gratuities they make, they earn. That belongs to them. That's their wages.

The biggest thing this bill proposes is that that leaves a lot of room for agreement between the employer and the employees, and their situation is different. I've been in a small-scale business for the past 16 years before coming into this House, and I remember that. I know that there are a number of small-scale business owners who also work on a daily basis in their own businesses, and that bill actually acknowledged that.

I will say that this is a very, very fair proposal to both sides. It takes everything into account, all sides of the issue, when you look into this. That is why the Alberta hospitality industry could not have done without looking at this. They came in endorsing this bill because people want to know the rules around the things they are doing in their daily life, in their businesses. That's all this bill is asking. It has been done in Quebec, it's done in Ontario, it's done in New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and it's in B.C. While we proposed this bill in this House and started discussing the issues, our neighbours and your cousins, basically – that's what you always feel proud of on that, calling them your great cousins – have done it.

Why does this government not want to take a look into this and not want to support this piece of legislation? If they see something that is missing in this bill, they have an opportunity to bring an amendment in, and the opposition agreed to that, to take a look at that and to work with the government members. There's none because they have no reasons, actually.

3:20

For the record I just wanted to say that the AFL did their own surveys. One of the scariest things is that people everywhere are facing an affordability crisis, but Alberta is in a different and unique situation in this country. The inflation is highest in Alberta in the country, and the minimum wage is the lowest in the country. You can see the gaps and how that could have impacted Albertans. That's what is recorded in the survey done by the AFL; 86 per cent of Albertans have cut back on going out. They're scared. But our Premier said that this was an achievement or a win for us, the tariffs and trade war. People are scared of the uncertainty created by this tariff and trade war.

At the same time that survey also found that 40 per cent of Albertans they spoke with felt that wage increases to match inflation would make life much more affordable, but there's nothing on the table. Like, in question period we ask this question, and we debate on this. The last time a minimum wage increase happened in this province was under the NDP government. This is a second-term UCP government and six years into governance.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak in strong support of Bill 210, which was introduced by my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods, which is at its heart all about protecting workers, protecting their rights, and making sure that

their tips, in fact, are protected and go to the folks that do the service and do that very, very hard work.

I know that we've heard from folks opposite or one folk opposite – sorry – not many folks yet, that it's cumbersome and that, you know, there are too many flaws in the bill and that there are too many gaps in the bill. Certainly, I would be of the opposite opinion. In my view, it's rather straightforward, it's rather practical, and it is in fact urgently needed because, in fact, it does indeed address a gap that we do find in our current legislation which can sometimes leave some of the most vulnerable workers open to and vulnerable to exploitation. Not only that, though; it means that when we're giving that tip, there's some assurance that the tip is actually going to land in that worker's pockets and that they will be able to use it for whatever it is they need to use it for.

Tipping is more than just about dollars and cents. I know in this day and age, when it's really, really easy to tip, you know, when that terminal comes over to us and we can choose the dollar amount or we can choose the percentage amount, it is very, very easy to tip, sometimes we don't even really think about it, but in the end it's really about being respectful of that person that is doing that job on our behalf. Whether or not you agree with the tipping culture that we find ourselves in these days, we're in the midst of it, so we should as legislators be doing something to make sure that we're protecting those workers for whom this is their job, this is their livelihood.

Quite frankly, it doesn't matter if it's a part-time livelihood or a full-time livelihood, if they've been doing it for five minutes or five years or for a lifetime, they deserve to have some employment standards protections, just as other workers do.

It's also important to make sure that their tips are not absorbed into the general revenue of a business operating expense. While that, of course, does not at all happen in most instances, there are some places where it does happen and where the workers have absolutely no recourse. This bill serves to make sure that workers, in fact, do have recourse, that there's a law in place that is designed to protect them. We shouldn't be leaving these workers out in the cold, Mr. Speaker, and without this bill we will continue to leave these workers out in the cold.

We know that, basically, tips and gratuities are not legally considered wages here in Alberta although, of course, the CRA does. There are no provincial rules that prevent an employer from taking some of a worker's tips. There's no obligation that tips get passed on to those workers who earn them. As I said, there's no legal recourse if tips are withheld or redistributed or just simply pocketed, as I talked about a moment ago.

That creates a vacuum, Mr. Speaker, a vacuum that leaves workers entirely dependent on the goodwill of their employer. I know, having personally worked in a couple of restaurants in my past, that there are some really, really fabulous employers out there that have really good conversations with the employees that they work with. They truly are team members. But there are also some employers who are not that great, quite frankly, and these are the employers that we do in fact have an obligation to protect some of these workers from.

Bill 210 changes that. As I say, it's practical. It's straightforward. It kind of makes those gaps nonexistent. It would formally recognize tips and gratuities as the property of the workers who earn them, prohibiting managers and employers from taking, withholding, or redistributing them unless they perform essentially the same work as the employees from whom those tips are taken. I think about many of the smaller businesses in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview where that is the situation, where workers are working right beside the owners. All they need to have is a good conversation about what's going to happen with those tips.

It allows for voluntary tip pooling among workers but would ban forced pooling because sometimes that is not at all in the worker's best interest. It would create clear and enforceable protections that centre workers' rights and dignity. You know, I mentioned a second ago that I worked in a restaurant, and I had a completely different experience than a family member who also worked in a number of restaurants. In our case it was a tip out and it kind of went to everyone, and we discussed it as a group, and it was seen to be inherently fair. But, Mr. Speaker, it wasn't the manager who was having those discussions. It was the employees themselves. We were able to make that decision ourselves.

But I do in fact have a family member who a few years ago was working in a couple of different establishments here in Edmonton; completely different experiences. One of the fine establishments was incredibly fair. Again, it was the workers who got together and decided whether or not it was going to be a tip out, which is what they eventually decided. But in another case she hardly saw anything. Hardly saw anything at all. Unfortunately, the tips ended up going up in the chain, and, you know, well, not knowing all the details, I would suspect they ended up going toward general revenue rather than toward the workers. As my colleagues have already said, when we do leave a tip, there is indeed this sort of trust, this compact that goes on. We do in fact expect that the person who has served us is going to be the prime beneficiary of that tip even if they're not the full beneficiary.

We know, of course, that this particular legislation is modelled after legislation that's already passed. I mean, goodness, if Ontario and Saskatchewan can figure out that protection of workers' tips is a good idea, you'd think we could, too. It, I think, reflects a balance between protecting workers and representing as well some of the practical realities of workplaces, and that's because it asks that people actually talk and they collaborate and they co-operate with one another.

As I mentioned before, we are having this discussion today because, as we know, tipping is sort of a given here in this country. Again, whether or not you agree with it isn't the point, but without legal protection, and right now there is no legal protection, workers can't even be assured that the tips that are meant for them actually get to them. As my colleagues have also talked about, over 70 per cent of Albertans currently expect that the person who provided the service will receive the tip, but without that legislation there's no requirement, as I've mentioned a couple of times, that employers will actually get that tip to that person.

Overall, though, Mr. Speaker, and this is certainly in my view, the best thing about this particular bill is that it puts the workers front and centre, it puts their needs front and centre, and it also is reflective of the day and age in which we live. We are as well in the midst of an affordability crisis, and these workers who are serving us in restaurants, in bars, in other hospitality establishments and resorts across the province deserve to be protected, too, and they deserve, really, to get the tips that are meant for them.

As colleagues have talked about, it doesn't involve setting up new systems. It uses existing ones that are already there. It doesn't in fact impose unworkable burdens on businesses. It offers a familiar enforcement pathway. Employers are used to the employment standards branch. This isn't something different that they're going to have to get used to. More than that, it does in fact provide clarity. The minister was talking about the fact that it sort of creates more questions than it answers, but certainly that isn't my view.

3:30

I think it provides a great deal of clarity. It clarifies that employers must pass on tips unless a worker voluntarily agrees to

that fair pooling system, and it doesn't stop pooling systems from being used. It recognizes the collaborative work environment of many workplaces. It doesn't stop front-of-house staff from pooling tips with folks on the line, and it doesn't mean that employers who do similar work will be frozen out. In fact, it's a really flexible answer that we know the hospitality industry has already said is something that's actually needed.

Protecting workers' tips also directly addresses not only the worsening affordability crisis but also some really key issues of equity and justice. We know that workers in tipped industries are often disproportionately women, young people, newcomers, and often racialized workers. These workers already face so many systemic barriers to advancement. They experience higher rates of economic insecurity and greater vulnerability generally to exploitation. Without clear protection, which my colleague's bill provides, the only thing that happens is that these inequities deepen, which leads those workers who are least able to challenge unfair practices – and I appreciate the minister talking about employment standards and the fact that it is in fact available for workers.

But I know, having talked to a few folks from the Alberta Workers' Resource Centre, that they are dealing with many, many people who attempted to go the employment standards route and found themselves completely and utterly stymied. It wasn't until they reached out to the folks in the Alberta Workers' Resource Centre that they actually got some help because sometimes there aren't enough people on the other end of the phone, and sometimes they might not have the answer that you need. Sometimes it's just really, really hard to make that phone call because if you make that phone call you don't know if you're going to end up having a job in the end.

As we know, this is a government that time and time again fails to put Albertans first and fails to put workers first.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

I will recognize the next speaker, Calgary-Falconridge.

Member Boparai: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in strong support of Bill 210, Employment Standards (Protecting Workers' Tips) Amendment Act, 2024. On behalf of my colleagues in the Official Opposition I want to make it clear that this bill is crucial for protecting some of the most vulnerable workers in our province.

This bill is about fairness. It's about protecting the tips that workers like servers and cooks earn through their hard work. It's about ensuring that workers who provide direct service to the customers get to keep what those customers intended for them. It is a bill that stands up for hard-working Albertans who are already struggling to make ends meet in the face of a crushing affordability crisis, workers who have been left behind by the current government's failure to address the real needs of everyday people.

Unfortunately, far too many workers are facing an unjust situation. Instead of seeing the tips they earned, they're finding that these tips are taken by employers or managers. This leaves them with even less than what they were already struggling to survive with, and it's wrong. It's a situation that has been allowed to continue in our province for far too long. It's time we put an end to this exploitation.

The truth is that workers shouldn't have to fight to keep the tips they have earned, yet in Alberta that is exactly what is happening. Right now tips aren't regulated by the Employment Standards Code, which allows employers to pocket a portion of the tips meant for workers. This bill is here to fix that injustice. It ensures that tips go to the workers who earn them, not to the pockets of owners or managers who did not directly contribute to the service.

Let's look at the bill, what Bill 210 actually does. The bill makes several key amendments to the Employment Standards Code, but the most important one is that it ensures that workers get to keep the tips they earn. Under this bill it will no longer be allowed for employers or managers who don't directly provide service to take tips. The bill does allow for tip pooling, where employees can choose to share tips with others like cooks, food runners, or hosts, but this agreement must be voluntary. Workers should have the right to choose who they share their tips with, not have it imposed upon them.

This is a long overdue measure that will provide clarity and fairness for workers across the province. In fact, more than half of Alberta businesses have indicated they want clear regulations around tipping. This bill provides that clarity, ensuring businesses can establish fair and transparent tipping policies while workers know that the tips they earn are theirs to keep.

So what is the urgency of this bill? In Alberta the lack of formal regulations around tipping has allowed employers to take advantage of workers. A recent investigation by CBC *Marketplace* found that in over 100 establishments across Alberta ranging from sit-down restaurants to fast-food chains workers didn't see a single cent of the tips left for them; instead, 100 per cent of those tips went straight to the employers. Let me repeat that: 100 per cent of the tips that customers intended for the workers did not go to the workers. This is tip theft, and it is happening every day in Alberta. Customers believe their tips are going directly to the workers who serve them, but that's not the case. This is not just wrong; it's exploitation, and it's happening right under our noses.

Moreover, Mr. Speaker, the issue has become even more pressing as more tips are being paid electronically. As tips are increasingly paid via debit or credit cards, many customers don't realize that their tips may not even reach the worker who provided the service. When tips are paid in cash, customers can more easily see where their money is going, but with these electronic payments the system lacks transparency, and the risk of tip theft increases.

At the same time, tipping culture has been growing. Customers are being pressured to leave tips even in situations where little or no service has been provided such as at self-serve kiosks, drive-through windows, or for pickup orders. Some businesses have even raised the lowest tipping option to 20 per cent, often with no guarantee that it's going to the workers at all. This has created a growing sense of frustration among consumers, who feel that tipping has become too much of an obligation. It also highlights how unclear and unregulated the tipping system has become. Mr. Speaker, Bill 210 offers much-needed clarity and ensures that when tips are left for workers, they actually go to those workers.

Let's look at the broader economic context. Alberta is facing an affordability crisis. Inflation is rising, wages are stagnant, and families across the province are struggling to make ends meet. For many Albertans tips are a critical part of their income. Service workers rely heavily on tips to make a living, yet under the current system they are being exploited by businesses that are taking the money meant for them. This is not just a matter of fairness; it is a matter of economic survival. Mr. Speaker, tips are part of the income that these workers depend on. When employers take a portion of those tips, it makes it even harder for these workers to get by. This is particularly concerning because workers in the service industry are already some of the lowest paid workers in Alberta.

We know that women are disproportionately impacted by this. In 2023 women made up 62 per cent of those employed in hospitality and service jobs. This means women are more likely to be subjected to tip theft, further exacerbating the gender pay gap in our province.

3:40

Mr. Speaker, additionally, the reality of inflation is hitting Albertans hard. A 2024 poll found that 40 per cent of Albertans felt that wage increases to match inflation would make lives more affordable, but the UCP government has failed again and again to deliver on this. Instead of increasing wages or taking action to ensure fair compensation, the UCP has allowed businesses to continue to exploit workers by taking their tips. This is not only unfair; it is harmful to families trying to make ends meet. Workers are already facing skyrocketing rents, increasing grocery bills, rising insurances, utilities, and the list goes on. The last thing they should have to worry about is whether their hard-earned tips are being stolen by their employers.

Mr. Speaker, we need to stand up for hard-working Albertans. At the end of the day, Bill 210 is about standing up for those hard-working Albertans. It's about ensuring that the people who are working on the front lines serving customers day in and day out are treated fairly and compensated properly for the work they do. It's about restoring transparency and trust in the tipping system, and, most importantly, it's about making sure that Albertans don't have to fight for what they have earned. They should have the right to receive the tips that customers have given them in good faith. Let's remember that Alberta is one of the few provinces in Canada that still lacks formal protection for workers' tips.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.
The Member for Calgary-Edgemont.

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to begin by recognizing the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for her work in bringing forward this very important bill today. As the former minister of labour the member's commitment to fairness and dignity in Alberta workplaces is so well recognized. Bill 210 is another example of the member's commitment to standing up for workers and ensuring that when Albertans work hard, they are treated with the respect that they deserve.

Did you know that right now Alberta is one of the only provinces that does not have protections in place for workers' tips? That means that when a customer leaves a tip, intending it to go to a worker who served them, there's no law ensuring that that tip actually is going to go back to the person who earned it. Bill 210 addresses this by confirming three very important principles: that the tips are the property of the worker who earned them; that employers are prohibited from withholding, deducting, or misclassifying the tips; and that the workers may voluntarily enter into tip-pooling agreements under clear and fair conditions. This bill is about basic fairness. If you do the work, you should get to keep it.

The cost of living is soaring here in Alberta. Workers, especially those in the service industry, are really feeling the squeeze every day when they pay for their groceries, rent, child care, tuition, and transportation. Every dollar matters. When workers are tipped for their services, that tip is not a bonus for businesses. It's a direct thank you to the workers. Bill 210 ensures that those dollars actually stay in the pocket of the people who earn them.

In my role as the shadow minister for status of women I see how important this issue is, and it disproportionately impacts women. The service industry is heavily staffed by women, many who are balancing school, caregiving, and multiple jobs. When tips are skimmed or taken off the top, it's not just a financial hit; it's an erosion to their dignity and their independence. Protecting workers' tips is about protecting women's economic security.

It's another step forward in building workplaces that are safer, fairer, and more respectful. The member, when she was the minister of labour, also ended the mandatory requirements that forced women to wear high heels. I think that it just shows her continued commitment to women and to employees and the labour. It's all connected, because dignity at work matters.

I recently heard from a young woman in Calgary-Edgemont, a university student working as a server while she attends school, and she shared with us how much she relies on her tips to cover essentials like rent, groceries, insurance, tuition. In her own words, it says:

Good afternoon,

My name is Meghan, and I am a university student and server living in Ranchlands while I attend school. I am reaching out because I really hope you will support Bill 210.

I work in a restaurant, and like a lot of people in the service industry, tips are a huge part of my income. With how expensive everything is getting, like rent, groceries, insurance and tuition, I am counting every dollar. It is honestly frustrating knowing that right now there is nothing stopping employers from keeping part of the tips we earn. Customers think [that] they are tipping us for our service, but sometimes that money does not actually make it to the staff.

This bill would make sure tips go to the people who worked for them, not [the] owners or [the] managers. I also think it would build more trust with customers, because they deserve to know [that] their tips are actually helping the workers [that] they want to support.

At the end of the day, we work hard for those tips. They are not [bonuses] for the [businesses]. They are a way for customers to say thank you to us directly.

I really appreciate the work the NDP are doing to stand up for things like this. Thank you so much for taking the time to read this. It would mean a lot to see Bill 210 pass.

Sincerely,
Meghan

Well, I can assure you, Meghan, that I will be voting in favour of Bill 210 as well as everybody on this side of the House and hopefully, maybe, some people across the way.

This bill matters to people like her. It matters, you know, counting on these extra dollars so they can stay afloat. I realize that there have been some concerns raised regarding the potential for red tape for employers, but let's be clear. Bill 210 does not create unnecessary red tape. It provides simple, clear rules. Workers keep their tips, employers can't deduct them or withhold them, and workers can choose to pool their tips if they wish. The clarity reduces confusion. It doesn't increase it.

Questions have been raised about tip-pooling agreements and potential ambiguity. Again, Bill 210 requires written, voluntary agreements for pooling, ensuring transparency and fairness. It preserves flexibility within the workplace while protecting workers from coercion and unfair practices.

Finally, the enforcement concerns have been raised in the Alberta employment standards system already. That manages the wage complaints effectively. Adding tip protection falls naturally within that framework. Most businesses already maintain an electronic payment record, making compliance straightforward. Enforcement challenges are not a reason to deny basic fairness for Alberta's workers.

When we were in government, when the Alberta NDP was government, we raised the minimum wage to \$15 an hour because we believed that nobody working full time should live in poverty. Again, I would like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods and our former labour minister. Bill 210 builds on that legacy. It is

making sure that workers don't just survive but that they are respected for the work that they do and compensated fairly.

When Albertans leave a tip, they're showing respect for a worker's service. They're not padding an employer's profits. If you can't support basic fairness like this, you're not standing with the working people. You're standing in their way. You're not standing with Albertans. Protecting workers' tips shouldn't be controversial; it should be supported by everybody in this Chamber. It's common sense. It's putting fairness, it's putting dignity – we're looking at now respecting the people who keep Alberta's economy running – first. It is respect for the people that serve us when we go into the businesses.

I urge all of the members in this House to support Bill 210. You know, we need to be standing with the workers to protect their earnings and to show that in Alberta we value hard work and we value fairness. I've had the joy, a couple of times, of being able to, during constituency week and a few times before that, go into a restaurant, and the excitement when you tell the young server, "My goodness, my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods: she's got this bill, and it's going to protect your tips," and how excited they become to share this information and talk about the bill. And then: "Can I tell my colleagues? Is it okay if I share this with my other colleagues?" It's like: "please, yes, share this with everybody."

3:50

And I hope that many of these – and mostly young women have looked into Bill 210, that the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has put forward, and I hope that they start writing their MLAs, all of us, and CCing us to let us know that they actually want us all to support Bill 210. You know, we saw over the weekend how this was picked up, that CTV covered it, because it's important. Global News covered it. They were talking to the workers, they were talking to the restaurant people, they were listening and talking to people. And I think that it would be a good lesson to all of us to listen to what we're being told by industry, what we're being asked by the people that are members of restaurants and salons, and they're asking us to protect their tips, that they're not able to survive right now on just minimum wage alone, that they need these tips to be able to pay their bills, support their families, go to university.

All these things are so important, and it goes back again to that dignity and respect for people. We all want Alberta's economy to be thriving, but we need to know also that the people that are there are being taken care of and that they're being protected. You know, our wages: go back to that minimum wage. That minimum wage hasn't increased since the NDP were in government, and that's just shameful. It's shameful during . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member. I will ask the member that if you have not already tabled the letter that you referred to, you will table it.

Ms Hayter: Yes. I will table it tomorrow.

The Acting Speaker: Okay. Thank you.
The Member for St. Albert has risen.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and speak to private member's Bill 210, Employment Standards (Protecting Workers' Tips) Amendment Act, 2024. I'd like to also thank my colleague for bringing forward this private member's bill. It is really important, obviously, not for this government, but it is for the many thousands of workers that rely on tips. The bottom line is very, very simple. Workers deserve to keep their tips that they're left for their service. Businesses in Alberta want clear regulation

around tipping policies, and this government just refuses to do that, saying: oh, well, you know, what about the owners?

What about the workers? You know, it seems to be a bit of a theme, Mr. Speaker. This government likes to take or likes to direct funds or resources that are not meant for someone and direct them other places. Just talking about the new Canada disability benefit, \$200 a month for working-age, low-income disabled people, that this UCP government has decided they don't need because \$1,900 is more than enough for someone with a severe disability to live on; we know that's not true. Clearly, that's not true. This government has decided: "No, we know better. We're going to keep that." That's potentially up to \$15 million a month that they're keeping. All right. We can talk about that at another time.

But now what they're also doing is: no, it's too complex, too much red tape for us to actually bring in legislation that the vast majority of the rest of the country has. And they're not going to bring in this legislation because: too much red tape, too complex. That just seems like a cop-out, Mr. Speaker. We already know that B.C., Ontario, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, and Quebec already protect workers' tips, and Alberta again is falling behind.

I remember, when I first got elected, I would hear a lot from both sides, actually. I was, you know, somewhat new to politics, but I would hear from both sides. There was so much pride about Alberta being a leader in this, and I know we're leading in a lot of sectors, particularly oil and gas. I think we're leaders in some manufacturing. I think we lead the country in a lot of agriculture, a lot of the work that we do in agriculture. But there are a lot of places that we are really doing horribly bad, and one of those places is right here, the legislation that we're talking about. Now, it might not seem serious to members. It might not seem like a big deal to blow this off and to say: nah; we don't need it: too complex, too much red tape. But it actually impacts individual lives.

If you think about it, the vast majority of servers – now, there are some professional servers; don't get me wrong – the vast majority of people that work in this industry don't tend to do it as a lifelong career although one of my neighbours was a lifelong waitress, but I can tell you about that later. But this doesn't tend to be the job that they focus on. It tends to be a bit of a stepping stone, or it tends to be that younger workers are starting their careers there, or sometimes students are augmenting their income with this work. These are folks with not a lot of power and, certainly, not a lot of money. They do this work because it's fairly easy to find, it's plentiful, and they do it because of the tips. The tips are the difference, because these are not high-paid jobs. These tend to be minimum wage jobs, so they are doing it for the tips. But I have heard from people that continue to work in this industry that it has gotten really bad. It's gotten so bad that it's ridiculous.

Now, I know that I don't go to restaurants a whole lot, but when I do, I have noticed that the tipping function is quite different. I think I heard some of my colleagues talking about it, that it actually starts at 20 per cent. I remember when I used to tip 20 per cent. I thought: oh, that's quite generous; I'm very proud of myself. But it's actually not now because in some places it's the lowest, and then it goes up to – I don't know; maybe, like, 30 per cent was the highest that I've seen. Maybe it goes higher than that.

What that tells me is that we've kind of missed the plot here. The plot was for the individual server. Now, I understand bus people and cooks and perhaps people that are guiding you to your table are also servers in a way. To have rules so that those folks who are actually doing the serving and the lowest paid workers are actually profiting from that, not the owners, I would suggest – I mean, again, I've been out of that industry for a pretty long time, well, decades.

But I thought that at some point people with different skill sets, perhaps sous-chefs or chefs or cooks are actually starting at a higher wage. They're still getting a tipping portion, but they're starting at a higher wage to make up for that difference, so they're able to support themselves that way.

You know, it's a bit shocking to me, actually, Mr. Speaker, that such a kind of simple piece of legislation in the sense that – I think we've all been tippers, probably a good chunk of us have been servers at some point in our life, so we understand the need for this very, very clearly. To listen to the government say: "Yeah. We can't do this because of red tape, and what about the owners? You know, we don't want to cause difficulty for the owners. Yeah. We've got other things to do, and let's not get involved in this." This would be such a simple fix and would really just catch us up to the rest of the country.

You know, we used to lead the way in education funding. We don't anymore; we're dead last. We used to lead the way in a lot of disability supports. I used to proudly say – I used to hear colleagues and friends from Ontario talk about these crazy, exploding wait-lists for disability services, and I would even say things, Mr. Speaker, like: you know, we might have a terrible government and don't totally trust them, and they're kind of corrupt, but we used to see their wait-list; they didn't used to hide it. So there was some clarity there, but we've failed there, too. That is no longer the case. We used to be such leaders in so many different areas: protecting workers, protecting people, health care, education. We're just sucking wind now. It's, like, the bare minimum.

What this government seems to be focused on is: how can we enrich our friends and insiders and ourselves and the people that we care about? Everyone else, you're kind of on your own. That's not fair.

This is something that you could do. I can't really believe I'm saying this. I don't know if you all know this, but people that are actually in this industry don't think very highly of your refusal to pass this. I would suggest that just changing your tone and changing your position on this would go a long way for you. It would go a long way to rebuilding some trust, because let me tell you: you've lost a lot. You didn't have a lot to begin with at the beginning of this particular term, but it's gotten much worse.

Now, I want to tell you one of the things that has really bothered me, too. It is that a lot of young people, a lot of youth, a lot of women – let's just put that out there – a lot of women are in this sector. What we're seeing, though, is a trend of older people having to go back to work because they can't afford to retire. That's going to get even worse when this government gets their hand on CPP and does whatever they do with it, but people are struggling. People are struggling to even retire at 65 or 70 because they can't afford it.

4:00

When I bought my first house – this was, you know, back in the stone ages – I couldn't afford much. So I had to look around for something that I could afford, and it was in a really old area, and I bought a house. We worked really hard and renovated, but I got to know – I lived in a really blue-collar area, a real working-class area, and I met some of the greatest people ever, many of which I'm still friends with.

The one woman that really touched my life – I lived there for 10 years – her name was Josie, and Josie was a waitress her entire life. She was a single mom, had one child, and she was a waitress. She worked at a breakfast restaurant, right? Every day get there at 5:30 in the morning, work till whenever, and she counted on those tips. I knew her when she was in her 50s – now, this was years ago – and she was still working. I checked back with her. She's almost 70, and she's still working. She absolutely cannot afford to retire, but

what she's also struggling with is her tips have gone down and not because of the generosity of Albertans. I think Albertans are, for the most part, pretty solid tippers. I mean, I don't know about all of the communities in Alberta, but I think Albertans are pretty solid tippers.

What she said was: "I have to work more shifts to keep what I used to keep, even though people are tipping more, because I'm tipping out more. There are more people that I have to tip out. It's not just the buspeople or the dishwashers or the hostess or the cook, but it's the manager and the assistant manager and the guy that cleaned at night." So her tips have gone down. There is no protection for what we as customers, consumers – when we go, we appreciate the service; we tip the server. We don't want the owners deciding how much of what we gave the server – and by server, I mean, that could be busboy as well, that could be a dishwasher as well or whatever that is, but these companies have no business changing that.

There should be some protected legislation for this group of workers that typically live in the margins. These are not wealthy people. They're trying really hard to support themselves, and when you allow people to do better and lift themselves out of poverty, I guarantee you there is less pressure on government.

The Acting Speaker: Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Metz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm really pleased to speak to Bill 210. I want to thank my colleagues for talking about so many important aspects of this bill and, of course, my colleague who put this bill forward.

It is critically important that we look after the citizens of Alberta working in different areas, different parts of the private sector where tipping is a major part of the income that is often earned because of the very low wages, usually minimum wage that is earned by people with the expectation that they're going to make more based on tips. But this becomes a very big problem when the reality is that very often the money from that tip that I may leave that person is not actually going to that individual.

Over the last several months I routinely began asking everywhere where I was asked to leave a tip or a restaurant where I would maybe not be asked but assumed that I would leave a tip: how much do you get? I would ask the servers, and I was shocked at how often I would hear that the tips don't even go to them at all. I felt swindled out of my money. If the owner wanted to ask: hey, would you like to pay me more? That would be fair. They can ask me. I can say: no, thank you. Or maybe I do want to pay them more, but it would be my choice. What happens now is it is assumed – and they're relying on this – that the tip is going to the people that provide the service and that they're probably not well paid and that this is extra for the great food that's been cooked or the pleasant greeting or the tremendous service that you get, then to find out that it doesn't even go to them.

Recently – this was only about two weeks ago – I asked a waitress how much of the tip she got, and she said, "Well, I will get 6 per cent." I said, "Well, if I leave a 20 per cent tip, do you get 6 per cent and 14 per cent goes to the business or to the others being tipped out?" She said: "No. I get 6 per cent of that total tip." Six per cent of this. This is outrageous.

Now, I know that in many of the small businesses in my own community that I frequent, the service is provided by the owner of the business, and I tip them just like I would anyone else. They're providing the service, and of course they should get that tip. They're also the service provider. This bill absolutely allows for that. I have no trouble that the tips in this bill could go into a pool where the other people that are providing the service are part of that tipping

pool. But as a consumer I feel totally swindled out of my money when I'm assuming that a tip goes to the workers and little to none of it actually does.

Now, I mentioned that I also ask at any other business, not just a restaurant, that asks for tips or where a tip comes up on my Visa as I'm paying for it. You might get a manicure or a pedicure, and it comes up with: how much are you going to tip? More often than not I've found that this is as bad or worse than some restaurants, where this often goes just extra into the pocket of the company running the service. I would encourage all of you and all Albertans out there to ask before you pay: what happens with the tip? I can tell you that I no longer go to those places that, in my opinion, steal the money from their staff and swindle that money from me.

We need this legislation to protect the staff. We need this legislation supported to protect the reputation of this government as protecting consumers as well as workers. We're all getting hit in a way that we didn't expect by what's happening with this legislation. This is a time when many of us, especially workers in the service industries more than others, are very stressed economically. They shouldn't have to fight for their tips. They deserve to keep their tips for the service they provide, and they deserve very clear rules around what happens with those tips.

When my mother was living in continuing care, it often came up that we wanted to provide a nice tip for the staff, particularly at Christmastime. We were very appreciative that the place she was living in had a rule for the way they distributed gifts, and that was shared with all families and all people that lived there ahead of time. It was known that if you were going to provide tips, they asked that it be provided in a central way, and that would be then shared in a certain manner.

I think that this legislation is absolutely necessary so that all tipping is clear as to where it's going.

Now, we know that this government is unfortunately not making things more affordable for people. The cost of living is going up, but instead we're seeing money wasted on things starting back from their early days of a pipeline to nowhere. Then the stunt of spending money on children's Tylenol when it was known well ahead of time – and we've seen that from briefing notes – that there was a slim chance that this would result in any available drug at the time that it was needed because other measures being taken were going to make the drug available pretty much before this was, and we were spending. This government got swindled themselves into paying for way more than would ever be usable.

4:10

Instead of making life more affordable, we're seeing money going out the door on things that are ridiculous and only cost Albertans. We're seeing overpaying for private surgeries. We're seeing overpaying for all kinds of things rather than putting funding into programs that will help Albertans and supporting legislation that doesn't even cost them but will help workers and will help consumers. There really is a chance that they can support workers by supporting this bill. There's a chance that they can support all Albertans, anyone who uses any services and is ever asked for a tip, by giving clarity around where this goes.

I'd also like to highlight that Alberta should be a leader. We are one of the wealthiest provinces. Why is it that we don't even have good workers' protections that seven out of 10 other provinces already have? In British Columbia the Employment Standards Act protects employees' tips. Tips can only be held if they're part of a tip pool, and then these tips go to the workers and not the owners. In British Columbia employers and owners cannot receive the money from the tip pool unless they perform substantially similar duties to the workers.

In Ontario the Protecting Employees' Tips Act of 2015 also protects tips. Donations that are made, the employee can return their tips or other gratuities.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any others wishing to speak at this time? The Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and to speak to this bill. Partly because of the fact that I was listening to the minister speaking about – he had questions and felt that there were some pieces missing in the piece of legislation that needed to be addressed. I think part of the pieces of this is that, even though the minister was speaking about the fact that there are some questions, I do believe that the government does have an ability, if they think that this is actually a good idea, to just create changes.

We know, within private members' business, that they tend to be high-level pieces of legislation where regulations do need to be created, and part of those regulations do need to be done with partnership from government because the government does need to be able to implement those. So for the government to come into the Chamber and say, "Well, there needs to be some more clarity and some more definition around this legislation," great. Why doesn't the minister just work with the member who has drafted the bill and say, "Let's figure this out, let's look at those regulations, let's look at strengthening the language, and let's get this piece of legislation passed"? That would be a very constructive way for us to work together in this Chamber.

I find that the government and the minister just saying, "Well, I think there are pieces missing," is a cop-out of responsibility by this government and really just speaks to an ideology around the government not really wanting to support workers, not really wanting to address the overall issue that we're seeing and that the member is trying to address through this piece of legislation, when it comes to supporting individuals who are on minimum wage and also ensuring that their income is protected.

The reason I say this, Mr. Speaker, is that it is very clear from the decisions that this government is making when it comes to supporting Albertans around the affordability crisis, around looking at the fact – we know Albertans are struggling to pay their bills. We know Albertans are struggling with their housing and being able to pay their rent. We know Albertans are struggling with the cost of food in this province, yet we have the lowest minimum wage in the country. The government will say that that's not true, but first off, if you're under the age of 18, you only make \$13 an hour, which is significantly less than when we were in government, by \$2.

If the government was paying attention to what was going on for the rest of the country, on April 1, 2025, almost every single province in this country announced a salary increase for minimum wage. In Yukon, if you're on minimum wage, you make \$17.94. If you're in the Northwest Territories, you make \$16.70. If you're in Nunavut, you make \$19. In Newfoundland you make \$16; Prince Edward Island, \$16; Nova Scotia, \$15.70; New Brunswick, \$15.65; Quebec, \$15.75; Ontario, \$17.20, going up to \$17.60; Manitoba, \$15.80; British Columbia, \$17.40; Alberta and Saskatchewan – dun dun dun – \$15. We have the lowest minimum wage in the country, tied with Saskatchewan. Woo-hoo. Two Conservative provinces. High-five, Conservatives. Way to support working people in this country.

Mr. Getson: By getting them jobs.

Ms Sweet: You're getting them jobs. Wow. The government just said: we're getting them jobs. But we're not going to pay them for

them; we just expect them to work. That is the worst answer I could ever expect to hear from a government member opposite.

We should not be celebrating that we pay the least amount of money in the country when we're the richest province in the country. I can't believe the member opposite would say that. We are supposed to be the richest province in this country. The government talks about it all the time, how rich we are, yet the members opposite are saying: we got them a job; they should be thankful that they're making minimum wage. Lowest minimum wage in the country. Then, on top of that, we're saying: "Okay. They're making the lowest minimum wage in the country, but we want to at least protect their tips. We want to protect that little bit of extra."

Let's not forget this is the same government that at one point was talking about how if you're a server you should make less because you get tips. The only reason the government didn't implement that was because they compared themselves to Ontario, who had that rule, and Ontario got rid of it because you can't discriminate against someone based on what they do. You can apparently discriminate on how old they are, though, and pay them less. But you can't actually discriminate a minimum wage based on your employment if you're over the age of 18. Ontario got rid of it. The Conservatives here went: "Oh, wait a minute. I guess we're not going to do that. We're not going to pay them less to be a server because of their tips, but what we are going to do is not support a private member in introducing a piece of legislation that will protect their tips." Therefore, their employer can still take it.

That's how much this government cares about working people in this province. They don't, clearly. When every other province in this country is increasing minimum wage, Alberta says: "Nope. Not going to do it. Be happy that you have a job." I'm so thankful that the government has finally been honest. Just be thankful you have a job, right? [interjections] The members opposite are laughing. They're laughing at me right now. That is what the member said.

It's no different than the attitude that we see this government have when it comes to people who need support through this province. If you need victim services: "I'm sorry. We're going to cut that." If you're on AISH: "I'm sorry. You're only going to get what we give you because, you know, we think we're doing better than everybody else." Well, everybody else gets paid higher minimum wage across the country. Step up. Do that. Right? If you need any type of support by this government, don't expect it, is basically the message we're getting from Albertans.

If you're really good friends with them, if there's a benefit for this government, hands are open. "We'll give you whatever you want if we get it back. You donate to our party? Dollars for you. You take me to a hockey game? Here you go. I'll give you another good, cushy contract. If you hang out with me, you know me, and you're a part of our friend group with this government, we'll help you out, but if you're a working person, just be thankful you have a job," according to this government. "Just be thankful. Be thankful that we pay the lowest minimum wage and that if you're under the age of 18, you make \$2 less than the rest of the country." Awesome. Something to be really, really proud about.

4:20

I don't understand how this government can come in and say, "Well, this bill doesn't have all the information that we want in it, so we're not going to pass it," instead of saying, "We're going to work with the party and with the member that wrote the bill, and we're going to strengthen it so that we can get it passed." That's the solution to the problem. The minister knows what he wants in the bill. He has said that. So come and work with the member opposite, sit down, and work through those pieces that are missing, or – I

don't know – government can write regulation. Everything that we see by this government now when they write pieces of legislation goes into regulation. They're very good at regs. Write the regulations to help address the concerns that you have. You think the bill is weak? Strengthen it. Don't defeat it.

Stand up for working people. Secure their tips. Let them know that they have a right to it and that they've earned it and they deserve to take it home. They shouldn't have to go through the justice system, which the minister spoke about in his comments around: well, there are protections under the criminal code if you feel like your tips are being stolen. Or the government could strengthen it so that servers don't have to go to the criminal system to have to sue and/or have to take legal action against their employer to get their money back. Just protect their tips. Create a system that works.

For a government that's like, "We don't want to waste police time on things that we don't want to have to because we're so busy dealing with other criminals and dealing with other crimes," why wouldn't you just create a system that takes the police having to deal with talking to an employer who's taking someone's tips? Super easy. Don't expect minimum-wage working people to have to go to court to say: I think my tips were stolen. Just protect them. It's so easy.

I would really look forward as we continue to debate this to what the minister thinks about his colleagues saying they should just be thankful they have a job. "Be thankful." Apparently the government thinks you should just be thankful, thankful that you got a job. That just blows my mind, honestly. This government just thinks you should be thankful you have a job and get paid \$15 an hour.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to speak? The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've heard a few different perspectives on this bill. It's my pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 210, the Employment Standards (Protecting Workers' Tips) Amendment Act, 2024. One of the important perspectives is from the standpoint of the worker. Workers rely on tips as an essential component of their compensation. If they didn't get the tip, then they wouldn't be doing the job.

There is a fair and open labour market, and, very much unlike the heckles that I've heard across the aisle, nobody should be thankful for having a job. A job is something – nobody should be merely thankful for having a job. Let me say that. A job is a contract; it is a selling of services in return for a receipt of monetary benefits that let you put a roof over your head. It's a negotiation. So when an essential component of that negotiation is fraudulent, that is a problem, and that should be a problem for this government.

Consumers are partners in the tipping economy, and consumers' tips allow for lower prices, lower headline prices, lower prices on the menu so that people who have a little bit of ability to pay a little bit more can pay the workers for their good service. So it is exceedingly important, as the Member for Calgary-Varsity pointed out in some detail and very eloquently, that it is not just part of an unwritten social contract but part of fundamental consumer protection that a consumer who is putting money down to pay their servers a tip expects that that money goes to the servers and to the cooks and to the people who actually worked to provide that meal.

Now, let's be clear. If somebody goes to a restaurant and orders a steak – and a cheap steak now is, I don't know, 40 or 50 bucks – and gets a pork chop, they would have a cause of action against the restaurant owner. They would have a real problem with getting something that they thought that they were paying for that they

didn't receive. And it's the same thing on tipping. We don't allow as a society, as a government for somebody buying something to get something else, something cheaper and say: oh, that's fine; no problem. There are rules against that, and consumers have the right to expect the same rules, that when they pay for service delivery, it is actually going to the service.

Now, the third component of this that I want to talk about is the restaurant owner. Restauranting is an extremely difficult business. It is hard. A good restaurateur needs to be managing significant components, from the capital involved in their kitchen and the inventory, you know, having a very high spoilage inventory cost, to managing a workforce that values flexibility. These are all critical components of being a good restaurant manager and a good restaurant owner. The restaurant owners themselves know that when the rules around tipping are clarified, people will tip more. It's fundamental to consumer protection.

Now, I went to school for a couple of years. I got my graduate degree at Carnegie Mellon in Pittsburgh, and one of the big employers in Pittsburgh at the time – of course, this has now changed because it's all gone private equity, and it's very different. But one of the big employers in Pittsburgh, historically as well, was the Heinz Company. Of course, we know Heinz. We have the ketchup, the pickles, the beans. The founder, H. J. Heinz: his company got a huge lift when he made a very simple change to how his products were presented. He bottled them in glass jars so that the consumer could see exactly what they were getting. In advance of consumer protection around food, before the Food and Drug Administration was created, he had full literal transparency on what products he was selling to consumers. As a result, his business was successful.

Sears Corporation, way back when, had a completely transparent returns policy. You could return anything. Eaton's did the same thing in Canada. You could return anything for any reason, and they'd take it back. Amazon today does the same thing. Why? People spend more with companies that have strong return policies. So if we had good rules and full transparency on tipping arrangements, people would tip more. Restaurants could lower their prices as a consequence. That is why the Alberta Hospitality Association favours action on making sure that consumers know exactly what's happening with the tips that they pay.

It's very, very curious to me. I mean, we heard from the jobs minister a whole pile of concern trolling: boy, tip pools sound really complicated. Managed all the way across the country from coast to coast in legislation. I think that the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has done a tremendously strong and good amount of work on this bill, but let's face it. It is modelled after bills that exist similarly from coast to coast already. We're not reinventing the wheel. There's nothing new here.

The problem is very simple. Let workers keep what they've earned. Why is that so controversial to the other side? Why is it such a problem that when you do a job, you should get paid for it according to the contract that you signed? [interjection] Oh, the Member for Lethbridge-East just said: because you're tipping outside of the contract. No, no, no. That's not how it works. That is not how it works because the consumer doesn't know. The Member for Lethbridge-East, the Minister of Affordability and Utilities, my goodness, is saying that it is okay for restaurant owners to lie to consumers, to say that it's okay for tips to . . .

4:30

Mr. Amery: Point of order

The Acting Speaker: A point of order has been called. The deputy House leader.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j). The hon. member, I know, was full of passion and vigour in his submissions but is very much falsely and inappropriately accusing the hon. Minister of Affordability and Utilities of saying something that he did not say. This gives rise to a number of different sections under the standing orders, the least of which is that the member makes allegations, false allegations, against another member, imputes false or unavowed motives against another member, and uses abusive or insulting language. I would submit that this is a clear case of a point of order, and I'd ask the member to respectfully apologize and withdraw his statements.

Member Kayande: I apologize and withdraw, Mr. Speaker. My apologies.

The Acting Speaker: An apology?

Member Kayande: Yes.

The Acting Speaker: The apology is accepted and the remarks withdrawn. The member may continue.

Debate Continued

Member Kayande: This is very, very simple. Workers deserve to get paid what they thought they were getting paid. Consumers deserve protection for having their payments go to the purposes that they assume those payments are going towards.

Here's a problem. In many cases when you have a large party, there's a mandatory service charge hooked onto the bill. This is the problem for consumers: they can't opt out of these things, yet when you call something a service charge – and it's 18 per cent. It's 20 per cent. It's a lot of money. Here's the problem: there is no regulation on where that service charge goes to. It could just be pure margin. I think many consumers would be surprised, would be incredibly surprised and shocked to find that when they tip, when they pay a mandatory service charge, when there is something like a service fee, it's not actually going to the person performing the service. I think most consumers would find that pretty shocking. I think they would find that pretty upsetting.

I know I myself, now that I know this, ask every time before I tip: "Tell me, what happens to the tip? Who does it go to?" And in most cases they say something like, "Oh, yeah, there's a pooling arrangement." I'm, like: "Great. Does the house get a share of the pooling arrangement?" "Oh, yeah; absolutely." What are you talking about? How naive are you that you don't know that the house doesn't get a share? So let's do something that will actually help the people of Alberta, that doesn't cost the taxpayer anything, and just disclose where the tips go.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: We have approximately two minutes left.

The Member for Calgary-Bedlington to speak.

Ms Chapman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How many minutes do we have? Just a couple, right?

The Acting Speaker: Two.

Ms Chapman: Two. Oh, okay. I may have written down a few too many notes.

So pleased to rise to speak to Bill 210, Employment Standards (Protecting Workers' Tips) Amendment Act, 2024. My colleagues

have spoken so eloquently to this bill. The Member for St. Albert had a really good contribution to this, you know, just speaking about the way this government is comfortable with clawing back money that isn't theirs, right? Now, the example that she was providing was for AISH, the federal disability benefit being clawed back. There are lots of other examples, too, though. There's taking funds from the victims of crime fund to cover other Justice initiatives. Bill 39 is taking money from the Alberta legal foundation so that the UCP can pay less into legal aid.

You know, why we're talking about these things is just this concern that perhaps the members opposite really don't care if workers get their tips or not – right? – that they're perfectly happy with the management or whoever taking it. They are not thinking about these workers, and perhaps they've lost touch a little bit with what it can be like to work and be paid only minimum wage. There are people who are raising a family in Alberta, and they're doing it on minimum wage salaries, and I honestly don't know how they're doing it.

You used to be able to go to Costco, Mr. Speaker, and you could fill a cart for \$250. It is double that now. It is \$500 to buy a couple of weeks' worth of groceries for your family. You know, we're talking about low-income workers here who deserve . . .

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington, but under Standing Order 8(7)(a)(i), which provides up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private member's public bill to close debate, I invite the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition to close debate on Bill 210. She has waived that option.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:37 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Al-Guneid	Deol	Metz
Batten	Gray	Renaud
Boparai	Hayter	Shepherd
Ceci	Hoyle	Sweet
Chapman	Kayande	Wright, P.

Against the motion:

Amery	Jean	Rowswell
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Johnson	Schow
Boitchenko	Jones	Schulz
Bouchard	LaGrange	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	Nicolaides	Yao
Horner	Nixon	Yaseen
Hunter	Petrovic	

Totals: For – 15 Against – 41

[Motion for second reading of Bill 210 lost]

Bill 211

Arts and Creative Economy Advisory Council Act

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

Member Ceci: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to rise and speak in support of my private member's Bill 211, the Arts and Creative Economy Advisory Council Act.

My private member's bill, if passed, is not merely a legislative tool; it's a declaration of our commitment to fostering a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable creative economy. Alberta's creative industries are essential for Alberta. Art improves quality of life, but the arts also have a significant impact on our economy: billions in direct GDP and even more in wages.

Mr. Speaker, I recently rose in this House and said that a province that does not invest in its art and culture is a province that forgets itself. If Alberta truly wishes to strengthen and diversify its economy and forge its own identity, especially at this time when the President of the United States repeatedly says that Canada and our province would be better off as the 51st state, we must invest in our arts and culture to declare unequivocally that we are Canadian, we are Albertans, and we will never be the 51st state. Our artists and cultural institutions in the province can and will make that abundantly clear in art, in music, in theatre, and literature, but they need strong support from this government to make it so.

At the heart of this bill is the appreciation that artists are not just creators; they are entrepreneurs, educators, and community leaders. By establishing the advisory council, we would empower artists and cultural organizations to have a direct voice in shaping the policies that affect them.

As we advance this bill, let us remember that the arts are not a luxury. They are a necessity. They enrich our lives, reflect our diverse experiences, and drive innovation. Without art, a place is just roads and buildings, a place without a story, and a province without a story is easily forgotten.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta will never be the 51st state. By supporting the arts and creative economy and this bill, we are investing in Alberta's future, a future that is proud and free in a united Canada. I urge all members of this Assembly to support Bill 211. Together let us build a province where creativity thrives, communities flourish, and Albertans' cultural legacy continues to inspire generations to come.

Mr. Speaker, during my time as shadow minister of arts and culture, I've had the wonderful opportunity to consult with many stakeholders across this great province about the creative economy sector. During the course of my speaking to this bill I will share some of what I have heard, but I can summarize at an extremely high level right now what I've heard. Stakeholders across the creative industry sector are asking for this bill. They want the opportunity to affect not only legislation, but they want the opportunity to declare their commitment to fostering a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable economy. They want the opportunity to have a direct line and the ear of the minister of arts and culture. They want the opportunity to better direct their future in this province with greater investments.

Sorry, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Two minutes.

Member Ceci: Oh. Okay.

The Speaker: Now, you have five minutes, but two minutes before 5 o'clock.

Member Ceci: Two minutes before 5 o'clock? Okay.

Mr. Speaker, we are at an important crossroads in Alberta's journey, a moment where we can choose to recognize the profound impact of the arts and creative industries on our province's identity, economy, and future. The establishment of an arts and creative economy advisory council, as I've proposed here, would mark a significant step towards integrating the arts into the broader economic and social fabric of our province. This arts and creative economy council that I'm proposing, based on consultation with artists and cultural leaders, would serve as a strategic body which would have at least seven members from five separate creative industries, with gender . . .

5:00

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt. However, the time for debate on this matter has expired. You will have four minutes remaining to conclude your remarks at the next available Monday.

Motions Other than Government Motions

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*.

[Debate adjourned April 14: Mr. Sabir speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has seven minutes remaining, should he choose to use it.

Seeing not, there are 27 minutes remaining of debate, and I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia has risen.

Member Batten: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and speak in favour of the motion brought forward by my colleague the Member for Calgary-Beddington. Now, private member's Motion 522, it's ask is pretty simple: provide teaching resources necessary to support Albertan learners. That's it. Just support our learners and our teachers.

In this private member's motion it even references a government report, the 2003 Alberta's Commission on Learning report *Every Child Learns; Every Child Succeeds*. Now, that report is now 22 years old, Mr. Speaker. Yikes; 22 years old. Even in 22 years the Conservative government has failed to follow the recommendations.

In this report there were clear recommendations for the funding of educator to learner. The Member for Calgary-Beddington already shared the recommendations where ideally a kindergarten class would see 17 learners funded for every educator and in high school up to like 27 learners to 1 educator. Now, Mr. Speaker, this government has proudly shared dollar amounts, gloating that they're investing in education, but they're not telling the full story. The dollar amount means nothing without context. The context, of course, of the 2025-2026 budget that has been passed is that this government invested in education 48 students to 1 educator. This is so far from the recommendations, and this does not serve Albertan children.

Over constit week, Mr. Speaker, I got to spend some time with some grade 2 learners. Now, with the new curriculum grade 2 is when Albertan children learn initially about government, so this

was fun. Picture a room of 82 grade 2 students, one room, three classes, myself, and my amazing staff.

Mr. Stephan: Sounds like fun.

Member Batten: It was. It was great fun.

Now, of course, the ratio that we're looking at there is 1 instructor to 27 grade 2 learners. I don't know how much time you've spent with grade 2s. They're like, what? Seven-year-olds?

Mr. Stephan: They're awesome.

Member Batten: They are awesome. They are a lot of fun. They're little sponges. They're ready to learn. But 83 of them in the same space was a lot, let me tell you. When I was preparing to see these kiddos, the teachers had kind of warned me and said, "You know what? They have really short attention spans," because, of course, they're seven. We had to come up with some activities.

Let's just think about that for a second. We have a ratio here in this specific class of 27 grade 2 students to 1 educator. Now, imagine, even if it's just low complexity – right? – that these students have no concerns and they have received every benefit all the way up. That is still an absurd number of seven-year-olds to try to manage, let alone educate, especially when we're teaching them things as fundamental as how our government works.

Now, initially we had come up with this beautiful activity because we'd been told that they have very short attention spans. Well, as it turns out, Mr. Speaker, they wanted to question all day long, and we had to stop them so we could do an activity. The questions they asked: they really were concerned about safety. They're worried about the wildfire season – right? – because they see what's happening. They understand that fires are already raging and not enough is being done. They are worried. If there's a flood, what's going to happen? What can the government do? They even asked me about underwater earthquakes because, you know, that's something we see in Alberta.

Now, my answer to these various questions was admittedly a bit of an optimistic one, and that answer was that for all of these safety concerns the government and the opposition work together to find the best solution. In fact, I even went further and explained to them that all levels of government should work together to find a solution, and I'm really hoping this government doesn't make me, well, have misspoken to the grade 2 students.

Back to the private member's Motion 522. A big shout-out to our educators. Like I said, I spent some time with grade 2 students and as much as they are amazing, it was tiring. So I can only imagine how hard that job is day in, day out, especially when you're looking at overcrowded classrooms.

In preparation for today, of course, I reviewed the prior debate on this motion, and I noticed some similarities to other debates that have been conducted inside this House during this session. A little bit of *déjà vu*, you might say. One of them was that I find myself standing here again, Mr. Speaker, reminding the House how important early childhood development is. That's what we're talking about. When we're talking about our kids, we're talking about Alberta children being educated. This is what we're talking about.

We know research shows that the quality of the educators is directly accountable for the quality of the education those children receive. We had this debate already when the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade decided that the cost-effective flat rate was appropriate, which it's not, and deleted the middle- to low-income subsidy, leaving 70,000 children without access to affordable child care. This government also walked away from a \$6 billion agreement with the federal government.

Now, when we think about how this government has approached children in Alberta, it's not just education, right? It's across the board. I do want to remind this House of one thing. Back in 2023, the fall, there was an E coli outbreak. Almost 500 Albertans were made very ill, some of which, young children now, continue to have medical problems from it. This government commissioned a report. You can guess how many recommendations they've followed since. I really, really hope that we don't continue to see this from this government, wasting taxpayer dollars on reports that they don't pay attention to and recommendations they don't follow. I'm really hoping this government shows the emotional maturity to look past the whole voting with opposition thing and vote for Albertan children.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Member Hoyle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleague the Member for Calgary-Beddington for putting forward this Motion 522, which I'm happy to speak to, because we really do need to take this issue very, very seriously. Alberta classrooms are overcrowded and underfunded and have been for years under this UCP government. That's why this motion urges the UCP government to finally 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. Our students deserve a world-class education in classrooms where they can get the support and the attention they need. Our teachers deserve an environment where they can effectively educate students, especially when so many students have diverse needs.

Classroom overcrowding is a major issue in Edmonton-South, my riding, one of the fastest growing communities in the province; 4 in 10 Alberta teachers report their class size is over 30 students. Building new schools, expanding existing capacity, and hiring more teachers, administration, and support staff is key to addressing this issue. Budget 2025 showed that the UCP missed their own teaching hiring target by 106 teachers. Alberta added 33,000 students to schools in the 2024-25 school year but only added 694 teachers. This makes the hiring rate 1 teacher for every 48 students in the 2024 school year. Yes, you heard that right, Mr. Speaker: 1 teacher per 48 students.

5:10

In my riding of Edmonton-South young children, some only in kindergarten, are being told they need to commute 25-plus kilometres round trip for school because not only is their catchment school full but all of the surrounding nearby schools are full as well. Of course, this government's most recent budget provided no funding for expanding capacity at existing K to 9 schools in Edmonton-South, which are bursting at the seams. No funding for modular classrooms or pods, which could significantly benefit young students. But the UCP seems to be content with failing families.

The members opposite should vote in favour of Motion 522 at a time when Alberta classrooms are in crisis. Parents who are already dealing with the affordability crisis, the strain of holding multiple jobs, working hard to do their best shouldn't also be expected to commute an hour or more a day to get their little ones to school, and then when they do get their little ones to school, they are unable to get the quality education and support needed.

I know that families move to Edmonton-South because it's a wonderful place to start and raise a family, like my husband and I

did over 21 years ago, but like so many Albertans they're feeling the strain of reckless policies under this UCP government. Roughly 200 Alberta schools were over capacity in the 2023-24 school year. It was the UCP that removed public data on class sizes in the province, but that doesn't seem to mean that parents, students, and educators can't see that Alberta classrooms are not meeting the basic guidelines.

This government continues to fall short on properly funding our education system so that our children are set up for success. Instead, we have a Premier who's more interested in self-serving agendas, cozying up to extremists, and taking lavish trips to meet radical political commentators in the U.S. while students and teachers bear the brunt of chronic underfunding.

The president of the Alberta Teachers' Association noted that the province would need an investment of more than \$9 billion in public education as well as more than 5,000 new teachers to address large class sizes and complex learners, but this government is not hiring nearly enough teachers to meet the basic current demands. We're not hiring enough support staff like educational assistants, providing fair wages for existing staff to be able to support teachers and students.

Alberta's 2014-2015 fiscal year ended up with a budgeted teacher-per-capita rate of 8.54 per 1,000 people. A decade later that dropped to 8.14 per 1,000. The only exception is under the NDP government, when the teacher-per-capita rate was actually on the rise, with the teacher-per-capita rate increasing from a low of 8.4 per 1,000 in 2015 to 8.68 per 1,000 going into 2019.

These are real issues facing the education system. We've heard from hundreds of educators who are considering or are already leaving the profession because of these challenges. Only 22 per cent of teachers reported feeling somewhat or very happy compared to a striking 89 per cent who reported feeling stressed and 93 per cent who reported feeling exhausted at the end of the day. Unrealistic class sizes, unsupported students' needs, and the inability to disconnect from work have led to widespread burnout. All of this has a direct impact on student learning and well-being and, quite frankly, on families as a whole.

These are things that parents care about: ensuring their children receive quality education in a safe and welcoming environment. It is appalling – absolutely appalling – that in one of the wealthiest provinces in the country, Alberta students receive the lowest per-student funding nationally. It's an embarrassment.

Mr. Speaker, we need Motion 522 more than ever. On this side of the aisle we expect this UCP government to finally step up and do everything possible to address that our classrooms in crisis get the support they need.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have just a few things to say about this one. Motion 522, class size guidelines. I do want to thank my colleague for bringing this one forward. This has been one of those subjects that teachers have been talking about since my grandmother was a teacher in the 1930s and '40s. Even in those days in those small, one-room schoolhouses, where my grandmother started teaching, there were, as I'm sure all of us know – I'm sure we've all seen the pictures. It wasn't just a matter of five kids or 10 kids or 15; there were often 30 or 40 kids in that room at the same time. At that point the teacher, she or he, not only just had to teach all of those kids, but what that person was doing was teaching a curriculum that often went from grade 1 all the way up to, say, grade 9 or grade 10, depending upon where that particular

school ended in those years. They had to juggle curriculum. They had to juggle kids of different ages. They had to help kids kind of figure out who they were going to be. That's the job of teachers. As we know, it isn't just about curriculum; it's about the kids who are at the centre of it all. It's the kids in the classroom.

For those of us who have been in this particular profession for a number of years, you know, we've got this sort of breadth of experience that I think can be brought to bear to this particular debate. I should say that I am in total support of this particular motion because we should be looking at these sorts of things. What we have right now is a government in power that, for some reason, doesn't like data, doesn't like collecting data, so we've lost much of that really important data that can really inform what our classrooms should be looking like, not just now but into the future. This motion answers that lack of data, Mr. Speaker. Not only that; it also puts those kids in the middle. We know that kids deserve to have a teacher in the classroom who can actually teach. I am here to tell you, as alluded to and as spoken very eloquently by my colleagues earlier, that our classrooms are in a real state of crisis.

Strangely enough, I was in the line for advance voting the other week, and there was a very young teacher there. He was in his early 30s. He unfortunately hasn't had the chance to have a long-term contract, but he's had a number of temporary contracts. This is a young teacher who's had many recent experiences in schools, in the junior high and high school area. You know, he was talking to me about his frustration. He loves to teach, but right now at this point he's not feeling like he's able to do it, and part of it was as a direct result of his experience most recently in the class.

Picture, if you will, grade 8s, close to a hundred of them, in a gym. Two teachers, no educational assistants. Divide the gym in half. Each one of those teachers has got 50 kids to attempt to teach something resembling phys ed to those kids. It's impossible. You know, you want to think about herding cats. Grade 8 kids, quite frankly, are a little bit difficult to herd at the best of times. I'm so sorry, all my lovely grade 8 kids. I know many of you – you're lovely; however, you can be a little bit difficult from time to time.

When you're looking at almost a hundred kids in a gymnasium divided in two, supposed to be teaching to the curriculum, you know that it's impossible. The stress that places on teachers, not to mention the kids in that room. What you end up having to do is simply divide people into groups. You know, you put a bunch of kids on the benches, and they are now sitting, doing nothing for the better part probably of that class until it comes their turn. That isn't good either because they, too, are not getting the education that they deserve. That is exactly what's happening in far too many of our classrooms now.

It isn't, however, a new problem. It's a problem, quite frankly, that really came to the fore during COVID and immediately after COVID, when we started cutting people from our educational system. At that point I was working with the prekindergarten classes over at a school in the northeast end of Edmonton. Those pre-K classes were – I don't know – a marvel, quite frankly. There was a limit on the number of kids that you can have in each classroom. Between eight and 10 kids: you had one teacher, you had two educational assistants and, in addition to that, you most often had a language pathology assistant. You had occupational therapists who were there, who came and did therapy. But then what happened during COVID, Mr. Speaker, was that the Minister of Education at the time decided to cut most of the educational assistants and, in addition, also cut most of those paraprofessionals that all of those kids depended upon.

5:20

The beauty of that particular program was that educators were working with health care workers. And it wasn't just about providing education; it was about providing skills and communication. It wasn't just about getting along; it was about helping kids who had some very complex disabilities to figure who they were in the classroom and to help them be that very best person that they could be in the classroom and then in all of that as well to prepare them for kindergarten. That was important, and we've lost much of that. Much of what we see today I believe is a direct result of that. It's a result of the underfunding and it's a result of, I think, some deliberateness.

What it's meant now is that – and I think about just when I was teaching a couple of years ago. What we noticed about those kindergarten kids who were coming into our kindergarten classroom, that was far too big, of 30 children, Mr. Speaker: 30 four-and-a-half- and five-year-olds that that one teacher was supposed to get through the kindergarten curriculum at the time, which was quite a little bit different than it is now, nonetheless, with one EA to start. Our school was very fortunate. We ended up getting – at one time we had a couple of extra educational assistants as well, but we couldn't do it forever because the budget simply didn't allow, so in the end: two EAs; one teacher; 30 children, two of whom were coded because they were such complex little kiddos; an additional four or five that were soon to be coded, but at the time they weren't. That meant that the money didn't follow, the resources didn't follow. Quite frankly, even if the money and the resources followed, it wouldn't be enough at all.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt; however, time for debate on this matter has concluded pursuant to Standing Order 8(3), that allows the mover of the motion up to five minutes to close debate.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington.

Ms Chapman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to my many colleagues who stood up and spoke to this motion. It's always nice to hear the support that we have on this side of the House for teachers and for kids in our schools. There was one government member who went to the trouble to actually stand up and say a few words. There are just a few things that I wanted to address about that.

You know, this is a really straightforward motion, what we're asking for. Again, what we're asking for is a return to the recommended class sizes as laid out by the Alberta Commission on Learning. Now, the Alberta Commission on Learning report is just about 20 years old at this point. As I mentioned when I moved the motion, I'd be absolutely more than happy to consider updates to that. I would love to hear that the government was moving forward with any kind of new report looking at education, doing any kind of cross-jurisdictional scans. I'd love to see that, but since that's not happening, we're going to stick with those 20-year-old numbers, right? Again, class sizes: we're talking about K to 3, 17 kids; grades 4 to 6, 23; 7 to 9, 25; 10 to 12, 27. The basis of this motion is this is the kind of class size that we're looking for.

Now, the biggest thing that stood out to me in the government member who spoke to this bill was his comment that this was a waste of time. I don't know. It kind of hurt my feelings a little bit. It was rude, but it was also terribly incorrect. I honestly don't think that talking about class sizes, about learning conditions for our kids is a waste of our time at all, Mr. Speaker. I sit through a lot of point of order debates that feel like a waste of time, but talking about our kids and their schools and their classes: that's certainly not a waste of time.

Another note – and this is what we hear from the government a lot – is this: our education budget is really big, you know, and they throw out these big numbers, \$1.1 billion and \$9.8 billion and all of these things. Yeah, but when you spread that across the 800,000 students that we have in the system, it turns out that our education number is really small, right? It's the smallest in the country. We still have the lowest funding per student in the country even though we are one of the richest provinces.

The member opposite who spoke about this talked about the classroom complexity grant being increased by 20 per cent. That's another one of those flashy numbers to throw out. Just so everyone is clear on this, what that works out to is an increase of \$13 per student, right? The base rate per student on the complexity grant used to be \$65. Now it's \$78 per student. To be clear, again, that \$55 million for increased funding for complexity barely covers what a single school division needs to actually spend on complexity in the classroom.

I'm going to take a pass on the spin, baby, spin, and these big numbers because the reality of what's happening in our classrooms is super easy to see. You can look at the utilization rate for schools in our metro areas that have this growing enrolment. You can see that in the CBE, there are only, like, three high schools that still have space. There are overflows for overflows.

Now, again, I would love to be having a really data-informed discussion at this point. The Minister of Education, you know, talks about increased demand for private schools. The biggest thing that private schools advertise is their class sizes. Go and look them up. That is the first thing that they are selling to parents: small class sizes.

Gosh, Mr. Speaker. I wonder: are smaller class sizes something that parents might want to see in their kids' schools? Is that perhaps the reason why they are seeking systems like privates or charters where class sizes can be more controlled? Yes. Obviously. If it is good enough for those kids, what I don't understand is why it is not good enough for the vast majority of Alberta children who attend public schools.

I see the Speaker's hand. Thank you so much for considering this motion. I urge us all to vote in support.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 522 lost]

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. members of this Assembly. Given that private members' motions have concluded for this afternoon, I would like to make a motion to adjourn the Assembly until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:28 p.m.]

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