



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, May 5, 2025

Day 106

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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

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Deputy Government House Leader
Arcand-Paul, Brooks, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA,
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Boitchenko, Andrew, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy Assistant Whip
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeschen, Hon. Devin, ECA, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Dyck, Nolan B., Grande Prairie (UC)
Eggen, Hon. David, ECA, Edmonton-North West (NDP)
Ellingson, Court, Calgary-Foothills (NDP)
Ellis, Hon. Mike, ECA, Calgary-West (UC),
Deputy Premier
Elmeligi, Sarah, Banff-Kananaskis (NDP)
Eremenko, Janet, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, ECA, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., ECA, Calgary-Mountain View (NDP),
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Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC),
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Glubish, Hon. Nate, ECA, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gray, Hon. Christina, ECA, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
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Official Opposition House Leader
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Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Hayter, Julia K.U., Calgary-Edgemont (NDP)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, ECA, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
Horner, Hon. Nate S., ECA, Drumheller-Stettler (UC)
Hoyle, Rhiannon, Edmonton-South (NDP)
Hunter, Hon. Grant R., ECA, Taber-Warner (UC)
Ip, Nathan, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
Official Opposition Assistant Whip
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(UC)
Johnson, Jennifer, Lacombe-Ponoka (UC)
Jones, Hon. Matt, ECA, Calgary-South East (UC)
Kasawski, Kyle, Sherwood Park (NDP)
Kayande, Samir, Calgary-Elbow (NDP)

LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, ECA, Red Deer-North (UC)
Loewen, Hon. Todd, ECA, Central Peace-Notley (UC)
Long, Hon. Martin M., ECA, West Yellowhead (UC)
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
Lunty, Brandon G., Leduc-Beaumont (UC)
McDougall, Myles, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
McIver, Hon. Ric, ECA, Calgary-Hays (UC)
Metz, Luanne, Calgary-Varsity (NDP)
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Nally, Hon. Dale, ECA, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)
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(UC)
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
Petrovic, Chelsae, Livingstone-Macleod (UC)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
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Sabir, Hon. Irfan, ECA, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP),
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Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, ECA, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, Hon. R.J., ECA, Highwood (UC)
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Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Hon. Danielle, ECA, Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC),
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Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Tejada, Lizette, Calgary-Klein (NDP)
Turton, Hon. Searle, ECA, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
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Deputy Government House Leader
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., ECA, Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Wright, Justin, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UC)
Wright, Peggy K., Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),
Deputy Government Whip
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Edmonton-Ellerslie
Vacant, Edmonton-Strathcona

Party standings:

United Conservative: 47

New Democrat: 36

Independent: 2

Vacant: 2

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Shannon Dean, KC, Clerk
Trafton Koenig, Law Clerk

Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and
Executive Director of Parliamentary
Services

Nancy Robert, Clerk of *Journals* and
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Amanda LeBlanc, Managing Editor of
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Gareth Scott, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Lang Bawn, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms

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| | |
|----------------------|---|
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| Mike Ellis | Deputy Premier, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services |
| Mickey Amery | Minister of Justice |
| Devin Dreesen | Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors |
| Tanya Fir | Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women |
| Nate Glubish | Minister of Technology and Innovation |
| Nate Horner | President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance |
| Brian Jean | Minister of Energy and Minerals |
| Matt Jones | Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade |
| Adriana LaGrange | Minister of Health |
| Todd Loewen | Minister of Forestry and Parks |
| Martin Long | Minister of Infrastructure |
| Ric McIver | Minister of Municipal Affairs |
| Dale Nally | Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction |
| Nathan Neudorf | Minister of Affordability and Utilities |
| Demetrios Nicolaides | Minister of Education |
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| Rajan Sawhney | Minister of Advanced Education |
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| Searle Turton | Minister of Children and Family Services |
| Dan Williams | Minister of Mental Health and Addiction |
| Rick Wilson | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Muhammad Yaseen | Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism |

Parliamentary Secretaries

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|---------------------------|--|
| Jackie Armstrong-Homeniuk | Parliamentary Secretary for Settlement Services and Ukrainian Evacuees |
| Andrew Boitchenko | Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous Relations |
| Chantelle de Jonge | Parliamentary Secretary for Affordability and Utilities |
| Nolan Dyck | Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous and Rural Policing |
| Shane Getson | Parliamentary Secretary for Economic Corridor Development |
| Chelsae Petrovic | Parliamentary Secretary for Health Workforce Engagement |
| Ron Wiebe | Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health (North) |
| Justin Wright | Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health (South) |
| Tany Yao | Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Northern Development |

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Yao

Deputy Chair: Mr. Rowswell

Boitchenko
Brar
Kasawski
Kayande
Stephan
Wiebe
Wright, J.

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Getson

Deputy Chair: Vacant

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

Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee

Chair: Mr. Getson

Deputy Chair: Mr. Long

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

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely

Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Batten
Haji
Johnson
Lunty
McDougall
Petrovic
Singh
Tejada

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Getson

Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Chapman
Cyr
Dyck
Eremenko
Lovely
Miyashiro
Petrovic
Shepherd

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper

Deputy Chair: Mr. Getson

Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Metz
Petrovic
Sabir
Singh
Yao

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms Pitt

Deputy Chair: Mr. Cyr

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

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk

Deputy Chair: Mr. Wiebe

Arcand-Paul
Bouchard
Ceci
Cyr
Dach
Gray
Sinclair
Stephan

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Sabir

Deputy Chair: Mr. Rowswell

Armstrong-Homeniuk
de Jonge
Ellingson
Johnson
Lunty
McDougall
Renaud
Schmidt

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Rowswell

Deputy Chair: Ms Sweet

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

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, May 5, 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 by Mr. Brent LaBrosse. I invite you to participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

The Speaker: The Legislative Assembly is grateful to be situated on Treaty 6 territory. This land has been the traditional region of the Métis people of Alberta, the Inuit, and the ancestral territory of the Cree, Dene, Blackfoot, Saulteaux, Iroquois, and Nakota Sioux people. The recognition of our history on this land is an act of reconciliation, and we honour those who walk with us. We further acknowledge that the province of Alberta 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, I do have a number of introductions to make today as well as a statement and a bit of a ceremony, as some of you will know.

First and foremost, it's my absolute pleasure to introduce to you and through me a group of Indigenous leaders from all across the country. They are guests of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, and they are here in Edmonton to have meetings with other treaty leaders here in the province of Alberta. Chief Dr. Matthew Coon Come, the former chief of the Mistissini, grand chief of the Grand Council of the Crees, and the national chief of the Assembly of First Nations has been a pivotal figure in Indigenous self-determination. As the principal negotiator he successfully secured multiple land claims and represented day scholars in the Indigenous residential school class-action lawsuit, and his leadership was instrumental during the Quebec sovereignty movement. Chief Jason Whiskeyjack from the Saddle Lake sovereign treaty nation; Kenneth Hall, Three Affiliated Tribes, U.S.A., member of the MHA tribal nation, the sovereign owners of the largest oil and gas producing nation in the continent; Cara Currie Hall, Maskwacis Cree, Treaty 6; and Councillor Lyle Morin, Enoch Cree. Hon. members, it's a great pleasure to have them here today as we work together to find the

best path forward for our great land. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. [Standing ovation]

Hon. members, this morning I also had the privilege to meet with a special guest who's seated in my gallery. He is the ambassador of Türkiye, His Excellency Can Didzar, and joining him are the consul general of Türkiye in Vancouver and the first secretary to the ambassador. Thank you so much for joining us today. The relationship between Türkiye and Alberta is an important one, and we look to continue to develop and grow that. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

There was some discussion that the former Premier was going to be joining us today to mark a very auspicious occasion, and just in case she happens to be somewhere in the gallery where I can't see her, I wanted to at least acknowledge that the hon. Premier Rachel Notley, the 17th Premier of Alberta and the 791st member ever elected to the Assembly, may in fact be joining us today. If she's here, please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Statement by the Speaker

Members' 10th Anniversary of Election

The Speaker: Hon. members, today marks a very special day for approximately 20 of you. Today marks the 10th year of service for several members. During the past decade each of these members has served with 169 other members, or 18 per cent of all members ever elected to the Assembly. There have been 581 House sessional days up to and including May 1, including 59 evening sittings past midnight. As we all know, nothing good happens after midnight, and that includes inside public policy. There have been 440 bills that have been introduced. During this time members have quoted no fewer than 32 poems or songs on all matter of topics, including Remembrance Day, Christmas, budget day, and the Stanley Cup playoffs, including the hon. member from the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills reading the lyrics from *The Greatest*. And my personal favourite – and no wonder why I have such great legs – is that the Speaker has stood to call order on 2,476 occasions.

Hon. members, it brings me great pleasure to welcome the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo – I was going to have to throw him out if I called him by name – the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung; the Member for Calgary-Mountain View; the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs although she's not with us today although I would never, never, never mention the presence or the absence of a member although we may celebrate her tomorrow; Edmonton-Mill Woods; Edmonton-Glenora; St. Albert; Calgary-Bhullar-McCall; Edmonton-Gold Bar; Edmonton-City Centre; Edmonton-Riverview; and Edmonton-Manning to the dais to receive your 10-year pin.

1:40

Now, hon. members, it's my pleasure to welcome to the dais to receive their 10-year pin the hon. members for Taber-Warner, Central Peace-Notley, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, Airdrie-East, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, and the hon. Member for the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Hon. members, please join me in welcoming and congratulating all 10-year service members. [Standing ovation]

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's my absolute pleasure to introduce one further guest who's joining us in the Speaker's gallery today. He is a former Senator of Montana visiting the Legislature and his grandson, who's playing in the mixed curling world championship that is being hosted here in Edmonton. He is

joined today by his beautiful bride, Carol. Mr. John Brenden, please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Hon. members, earlier today we were led in the singing of *O Canada* by Mr. Brent LaBrosse. Brent has been performing the anthem since the age of eight. He's performed at over 2,000 sporting and military events, including CHL all-star hockey games, two Memorial Cups, U.S. Presidents, Canadian Prime Ministers, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth. He lives in Red Deer, where he came from today, and shares his talents at the Sunnybrook United Church. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Also seated in my gallery today are guests of the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, Tonya Malo. Tonya was unable to attend the ceremony from last week, but she, too, has served the Legislative Assembly for 10 consecutive years, has been an incredible asset to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, and I know diligently serves the constituents of that region. Thank you, Tonya, for your service to the province. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Last but not least from introductions from the Speaker's gallery today we have the mother of the hon. MLA for Edmonton-Glenora – it's my hope that she will be on her best behaviour today; as we all know it can be a little suspect on occasion – Sylvia Hoffman, who is accompanied by her husband David Gordon. Whilst they're here to celebrate the 10-year service pin of the hon. member, they will also celebrate their 10th wedding anniversary on Thursday. Public health care helped them find each other. Their first spouses unfortunately passed away of cancer just days apart, and they met at a grief support group at the Cross Cancer Institute. They love travelling, gardening, and volunteering at Assumption parish and other Catholic church organizations. I invite them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Last, hon. members, I'm very pleased to introduce 28 teachers from across the province and their four facilitators from our education advisory committee, who are here to be part of the Alberta Teachers Institute on Parliamentary Democracy. This three-day intensive professional development opportunity offers teachers the chance to explore the inner workings of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, and I was pleased to join them for dinner last evening. I know the future of our province is bright with the children of our province in their hands. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Boitchenko: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to introduce to you and through you and to all the members of this Assembly the St. Anthony grade 6 class. I'm excited to have the young and bright future of my constituency attend today. I would like to ask them to please stand up and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to introduce to you and through you the fantastic grade 6 students of Constable Daniel Woodall school, along with teachers Ms Calp and Mrs. Parker, parent volunteers, and school staff. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize members of Alberta's cannabis industry: Omar Khan, Stephanie Bach, Ivan Vrána, and Nathan Mison of Diplomat Consulting. Alberta is a leader in safe, responsible cannabis regulation, from QR codes on packaging to exploring noncombustible use. I ask that you rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to all members of the Assembly. I have several introductions today, and I'll ask them to rise as I say their names. Tim Chu, press secretary when I was minister of seniors and housing in the Notley government; Kathy Williams, Ian Gray, and Marie Walker, Edmonton-Riverview volunteers extraordinaire – they're amazing, all three of them – and my son Wade Sigurdson, who some of you may know as a page. Not anymore.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you and to all members of the Assembly a group here from Covenant Health Palliative Institute. The institute offers several valuable resources for palliative care, like My Wishes Alberta, PalliLearn, and others. Louise, Maureen, Christy, Keltie, Tyler Sheila, Mary-Ann, and Manpreet: would you please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Chamber.

The Speaker: The hon. the chief government whip.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to reintroduce Senator John Brenden and his lovely wife. John is the friend and neighbour we have right across the border. He's been a friend to Canada for a long time. He is the Governor's designate for PNWER, and he's got one heck of a set of pipes. Maybe we'll have him back here one day to sing our anthem. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly, John.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Blake and Marilyn Pridgen from Calgary. They are the parents of my loyal and capable chief of staff. I invite them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:50

Dr. Metz: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to personally introduce to you Mr. Joseph Boissonneault, a constituent of Calgary-Varsity and one of our very hard-working teachers, who's here today to participate in the Alberta Teachers Institute on Parliamentary Democracy. He teaches at Guardian Angel school in the Calgary Catholic school district. He received an excellent public education at St. Vincent De Paul elementary and junior high with my children and Bishop Carroll high school, where I once attended.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, on this day of anniversary, I'm honoured to welcome and thank some special people. I wouldn't be here without their love and support. I invite John, Stephanie, Chantelle, Sandra, Paul, Jessica, Anand, Calan, Bette, and Neal to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you the previous minister of agriculture and forestry while we were in government, Oneil Carlier, as well as Sandra Houston, Jerry Toews, Kevin Aulakh, and Danny Hoyt, who have also been very important to me over the last 10 years.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through the rest of the members of the Assembly a teacher, Leanne Arthur, from Florence Hallock elementary, who is also a constituent of mine in Edmonton-McClung. I'd ask that she rise today and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my indefatigable constituency assistants, Lisa Hall and Kayden Tonita. I ask Lisa and Kayden to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? Seeing none.

Hon. members, the time is now 1:51. A shame upon the Speaker's office.

Mr. Schow: Shame.

The Speaker: Shame indeed.

Oral Question Period

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

Alberta Separatism and First Nations Treaty Rights

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, one of the most offensive aspects of this government's fanning the flame of separation is how much they are neglecting their treaty obligations. In case the Premier forgets, every person on these lands we call Alberta are here because of treaties. We welcome the great champion for Indigenous rights and for Canada, Chief Dr. Matthew Coon Come, here to our Assembly today. Did it not occur to the Premier that before facilitation of a separatist referendum she and her government would first have to actually talk to First Nations?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I have always respected and I always will respect the treaty agreements as well as the right that is enshrined in section 35 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms acknowledging the rights of First Nation, Métis, and Indigenous peoples in Alberta. This is non-negotiable. Any notion of any question that would ever come forward would have to honour those treaties. I think that has been well established in our Supreme Court of Canada, it's been well established in law, and it's been well established in our practice. We support treaty rights, and we support First Nations.

Ms Gray: The Premier and her caucus' separation rhetoric and efforts to undermine our united country have not just disrespected Canada but also all of the people who have built this country every day that she fails to get a better deal for Alberta in Confederation and every day she fails to uphold her obligations to respect the treaties. Given these failures, will the Premier work to heal the wounds she has opened with First Nation as well as Métis communities by denouncing the separatist rhetoric in our province?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our Minister of Indigenous Relations has done more than any provincial Indigenous minister to address the historic wrongs that were done through the residential

schools and, as well, through missing and murdered Indigenous women, the initiatives that he's done there. We have the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation, which was so pioneering that every other province has either adopted it or is considering doing so to give an equity stake to First Nations. Our Indigenous business investment fund has funded businesses that have created hundreds of jobs on-reserve, and we're going to continue doing that.

Ms Gray: The Premier continues to fail to clearly denounce separatism in this Chamber. Treaties cannot just be an afterthought while the Premier welcomes a separatist referendum. On a day when we hold space for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and two-spirit people, for those we have lost, it is critically important that this government centres their responsibilities under these treaties to uphold Indigenous rights. So from Indigenous communities to the Premier: what is her government doing for prevention and to help the families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and two-spirit people?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, we have a Premier's council on missing and murdered Indigenous women. I'm so grateful to the women who are involved in that along with my Indigenous Relations minister. We have commissioned a report and are working slowly but surely through all of the recommendations that have been put before us. We have a reconciliation garden that we opened up last year, and we have additional plans to do so in southern Alberta. This is vitally important for us to make sure that the wrongs that were done against Indigenous people are corrected.

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

Investigation of Health Services Procurement

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, we are watching this government get absolutely nothing done while they're bogged down in the worst scandal in this province's history. Every day the Premier has the Justice minister defending the corrupt care scandal, even after Albertans finally learned that the Justice minister himself has close personal connections to some of the people involved. The *Globe and Mail* recently reported that this Justice minister is a long-time friend and relative of Sam Mraiche. When did the Premier first learn her Minister of Justice is Sam Mraiche's relative, and why didn't she see that as an obvious conflict of interest?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what the member opposite is saying. Are we not allowed to see friends and family members anymore in our private lives, spending our own private money and doing our own private things? At the heart of this discussion is the issue of chartered surgical facilities. We know that they hate them. We know that they want to shut them down. We know that the former AHS CEO wanted to shut them down, but this government is going to make sure that we are investing in capacity so that we can increase the number of surgeries. If we did as they asked us to and shut down those surgeries, 2,000 people would not get them. We're not going to do that.

Ms Gray: If the Premier is not sure, let me be clear. The question is: when did she know? The question is that this is the government's lawyer, and conflict of interest legislation exists particularly because members of cabinet need to respect that these conflicts can happen and disclose accordingly. The Minister of Justice confirmed that he and Sam Mraiche had been friends for a very long time. Not

just friends; relatives. As such the Premier should have kept the Justice minister off anything to do with this scandal. Did the Premier require her Minister of Justice to recuse himself from all discussions and decisions related to the scandal? If not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just asked the Justice minister, and I gather that it's a cousin of his wife, so if you're asking me when I found out, I just found out right now that that's the case. But, secondarily, I think the members opposite should read the Conflicts of Interest Act. You have to recuse yourself if you are in a decision-making role over a decision of government. The Justice minister was in no decision-making role over chartered surgical centres and has been in no decision-making role over the oversight of this investigation. That's being done independently.

Ms Gray: This is the minister who is defending the government's case in the corrupt care scandal. The Premier repeatedly tells Albertans that she doesn't actually know what's going on. She just said it in the House that she only just found out the relation here. She has said that she hasn't read the PricewaterhouseCoopers report that AHS commissioned although she then told the Assembly what was in the report, so go figure that one out. She hadn't shared it with cabinet and because of that lost a cabinet minister over this scandal. How can she be the Premier when she doesn't ask questions, isn't transparent with her cabinet team, and doesn't know what's going on?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was able to quote from the document because it was in the statement of defence, which I've encouraged the members opposite to read. The statement of defence: well, if the members opposite had read it, they would have seen that both reports said that there was no reason whatsoever not to proceed with extending the contract to ASG. That is what the report said. We are going to continue to operate in an independent way. I am not involved in every detail of this because I want it to remain an independent report. I want to get independent advice from the Auditor General, independent advice from Judge Wyant. When we get those recommendations at the end of June, they'll be shared with the public, and I look forward to acting on them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.
2:00

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The UCP is mired in allegations of corruption, bloated contracts, and political interference. There are a number of investigations going on into this scandal, but the government has so far refused to call a public inquiry. This matter is also being investigated by the RCMP. The government has lost the trust of Albertans. So the question I have for the Premier is: will the Premier agree to appoint an out-of-province special prosecutor to oversee all aspects of this investigation? If not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll do the hon. member one better. We'll appoint an out-of-province judge to lead the investigation. The hon. member knows full well that a number of investigations are taking place, including one by the former Chief Justice of the provincial court of Manitoba. I think that we'll let those investigations pan out. We're not going to jump to conclusions, like the NDP does. We're going to let the investigations pan out. We're

going to read the reports, and we're going to do what we need to do after we see the results of those investigations.

Mr. Sabir: I hope the minister knows the difference between a prosecutor and a judge.

Last week the *Globe and Mail* reported that the Minister of Justice confirmed he is related to Sam Mraiche. The Premier just found out in question period as well. It's the same person who is at the heart of the UCP procurement corruption. All along the minister has been answering all questions related to this scandal. Does the Premier not see any conflict or potential conflict when the government's top lawyer and the Minister of Justice is related to the person who they are investigating right now?

Mr. Schow: Well, Mr. Speaker, first I will address the ridiculous assertion that the Minister of Justice doesn't know the difference between a prosecutor and a judge. I can tell you that if my back is against the wall, I'm taking that member over that one 10 times out of 10. But I'll tell you this as well: this is ridiculous, this fishing expedition the members opposite are on, looking to malign the character of the Minister of Justice. It is totally inappropriate. There are three independent investigations happening, and we're going to respect their independence.

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice has not been forthcoming in disclosing this relationship until pressed. In fact, they hid it. It took a journalist to confront the minister into admitting it. Clearly, the minister now can't be anywhere near this investigation. These allegations are serious. Now that the Premier also knows about this relationship, will the Premier fire the Minister of Justice right now or move him from this investigation, not let the minister come near this investigation?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All members of this Chamber know that annually we are required to disclose all of our personal interests. I didn't know that disclosing your family tree was also a requisite of sitting in this Chamber. What I can tell you is that on this side of the House we are elected, as members are opposite. We don't investigate. The Minister of Justice is not involved in that. There are three independent investigations going on between the RCMP, the Auditor General, and Judge Wyant, an out-of-province judge.

Measles Outbreak in Alberta

Ms Hoffman: The Premier campaigned against science and medical experts. She blocked public health experts from being hired and undermined vaccine effectiveness, and now we have a significant measles outbreak. Last week the Premier said that there were six communicable cases of measles. Then on Friday there were 26. The government waited until Monday, until children were in the intensive care unit, to call a press conference with the chief medical officer of health, and in that time 55 more people got measles over the weekend. Does this government regret delaying and stalling while children have been getting sick?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't know where the member opposite or their whole team have been over the last two months as measles have made their appearance in the province. They did come in from out of province and out of country, and we have been on it from the very beginning. The fact that the members opposite are maligning our public health officials, who in fact have

been working extremely, extremely hard to make sure that we contain cases, that they contact trace, that we up the number of immunizations available across the province. That work is paying off.

Ms Hoffman: The minister says that it's paying off while three children are in the hospital fighting for their lives and 55 more got measles over the weekend. Most of us who had our childhood vaccines before 1996 were only given one dose of the measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine. However, evidence shows that two doses are much more effective. By upping the dose to two vaccines in 1998, Canada had eliminated measles. I bet there are people in this Chamber and in every workplace in Alberta who could use an MMR booster. Given that we need 95 per cent of Albertans fully immunized to have herd immunity, will the minister ramp up the public health efforts today to make it easier for all Albertans to get their vaccines?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I wish the members opposite would take yes for an answer because we already ramped them up, and – you know what? – today we announced that we're going to ramp them up even further. In fact, because of the work that's been done, we saw a 67 per cent increase in the number of immunizations, over 32,000 immunizations between March 16 and April 20. That's 67 per cent more than this time last year. We're going to continue to do that. We've got a measles website, we continue to have 811 that you can access information, and we're going into those communities and reaching those people at their level.

Ms Hoffman: The number of measles cases per capita here in Alberta is higher than many countries on the CDC outbreak list. This is serious. Patients, young children in intensive care: measles can have serious long-term health consequences, or in the worst case scenario they lead to death. The acting CMOH won't be in the job for long, and we're in the midst of a serious public health crisis. Will the minister stop the chaos in public health and cut the sections of Bill 55 that cause further chaos to public health officials and force them to report to her in her ministry, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask the members opposite to stop politicizing immunizations and public health. In fact, we're going to continue to put out factual information. All infants six months to 12 months travelling outside of Canada or that are in one of these locations – because we do have some hot spots across the province. We don't have a provincial outbreak, but we do have areas of concern, specifically in the central and south zones. They can get the minibooster, all those infants six months to 12 months of age. We encourage families to make sure that their children are immunized.

Alberta in Canada

Ms Ganley: Ten years ago today a new government was elected in this province. The courtyard outside this building would soon be overflowing with people celebrating a cabinet that represented them. Obviously, I liked that government a lot better than this one, but I respect the process of elections even with our democracy under attack by the UCP. This weekend the courtyard was filled with separatists emboldened by the UCP's words and laws. We deserve to know where this government stands. Simple question: will even one minister over there stand and denounce separatism?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to stand in this Chamber and promote an Alberta sovereignty within a united Canada. We have said time and time again that we believe that we want Canada to be on Team Alberta if Canada wants Alberta to be on Team Canada. It's very simple. The Premier has laid out nine very important points that we need as a province to feel that we are part of this, and we feel very strongly that Canada cannot thrive without a strong Alberta.

Ms Ganley: Given that I think we just heard support of separatism and given that laws are what allow our society to operate peacefully and that the hatred and division of separatism threaten the law and invite chaos into our economy and our lives and given that I served four years as the Minister of Justice, the only one in the last decade to go four years without scandal or corruption, and know that it involves defending our system of laws, will the Minister of Justice stand up for law and order and treaty rights and against chaos and division and denounce separatism here and now?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No scandal or corruption: I would point to the power purchasing agreements.

But I digress, Mr. Speaker. What I would say is that this government – we are going to be meaningful contributors to Canada, to Confederation. But we ask for repealing ... [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, for the 2,475th time: order; order; order.
The hon. the Government House Leader.

2:10

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have asked for very important things such as repealing Bill C-69, the no-more-pipelines act; lifting the tanker ban off the B.C. coast; eliminating the oil and gas emissions cap, which is really, we all know, just a production cap; scrapping the so-called clean energy regulations; ending the prohibition on single-use plastics; and the list goes on and on. I'll say more in a moment.

Ms Ganley: Given that the separatist agenda is a violation of our sacred treaty obligations with First Nations whose ancestral lands we share, not to mention the trust placed in us as elected officials, and given that the duty of elected officials is to defend our laws and our economy from the chaos of separatism, chaos we know will occur because we saw it in Quebec, can even one minister over there, literally anyone, stand up right now and denounce separatism? Just say the words: I denounce separatism.

The Speaker: I just might provide a small word of caution that questions ought to be about government policy, and I didn't hear specific reference to government policy or how it might impact the government.

The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've talked to many of the chiefs over the last couple of days. They've been reaching out to me. I've made it crystal clear that what we're advocating for is a strong and prosperous Alberta within a united Canada and for everybody to just take a collective breath and just relax a little. I mean, emotions are running high after the last election. I think that if we hear what the Premier has got to say later today, I'm sure everybody is going to be happy with that.

Thank you.

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

Mental Health and Addiction Services

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today marks the beginning of Mental Health Week, recognized across the country to bring awareness and highlight the importance of taking care of our mental well-being. Alberta's government has been a proud proponent of better access to services that support people with better mental health, making our province a better place for everyone no matter what challenges we face. To the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction: what investments has Alberta made to bring more access to people dealing with mental health challenges?

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

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to that member for recognizing, yes, the start of this Mental Health Week, where we know as government we have an obligation to partner with communities, families, and civil society to bring investment so that mental health is cared for for every single Albertan. Of course, we have had an investment of about \$70 million in CASA classrooms so that we can increase, tripling the capacity across the province; building CASA homes with a \$69 million investment for three new facilities across the province; same-day access to Counselling Alberta with \$28 million; doubling the funding for Alberta 211 at a \$15 million a year annual investment. We will continue to invest because it is so important for us to continue investing in mental health and addiction.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that in the past six years our government has made significant investments into mental health and addiction services, building the world-leading Alberta recovery model, and given that this has included more investment for addiction treatment services such as the one announced this morning at Alberta Hospital Edmonton and given that this is an exciting investment that will not only create jobs but also rebuild lives of those who suffer from this deadly disease of addiction, to the same minister: what changes does your announcement bring to the site of Alberta Hospital Edmonton?

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

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Though it's Mental Health Week for everyone, it's mental health year for me day in and day out, which is why we worked so hard to bring these investments of \$141 million to Alberta Hospital Edmonton, something members opposite planned and promised but never fulfilled. We're keeping our word to make sure we see a \$14 million investment in infrastructure. We're making sure we see a \$90 million investment in compassionate invention so we can have secure treatment for those suffering from addiction with concurrent mental health disorders and, of course, a \$38 million investment in recovery communities. We believe in this for the Edmonton region and the Edmonton hospital for those suffering from mental health and addiction because every Albertan has inherent human dignity.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta Hospital Edmonton is Alberta's oldest mental health facility, first opening its doors more than a hundred years ago, and given that it has been left with little to no investment for far too long despite the NDP former Health minister in 2015 saying that Alberta Hospital Edmonton hadn't been forgotten – they forgot – and further given that our UCP government has not forgotten and proved it today with

the announcement, to the same minister: how will this investment restore health, wellness, and recovery to those suffering from mental health and addiction challenges?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, this is important that we see another century of investment in Alberta Hospital Edmonton. We believe on this side of the aisle in Alberta Hospital Edmonton being a key part of getting access to mental health resources, especially those who are in crisis, who have no other alternative. We believe recovery is possible and not only possible but probable, whether it be addiction or a diagnosed mental illness. Because we believe in the inherent dignity of every single Albertan, we want to make sure those investments are there, which is why \$141 million is just the start. We're going to continue year after year to invest in maintaining that infrastructure, revitalizing as we continue to put up new facilities in the Edmonton area.

Provincial Police Agency

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. The UCP plan for a provincial police force isn't about helping rural Albertans. It's not about making our communities safer. It's about the UCP's desperate need to pick fights to distract from their own incompetence and corruption and the Premier's open flirtation with separation. In fact, it's taken directly from the separation strategy . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Mr. Shepherd: . . . penned by her chief of staff, right between the sovereignty act and an Alberta pension plan. To the minister of public safety: should we take Bill 49 as this government's full endorsement of the free Alberta strategy, or will the minister clarify his position on separation today?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, nothing can be further from the truth than anything that member just said. In the Public Safety Canada report titled A New Policing Vision for Canada it says, "Canada's role in supporting provinces in their delivery of policing services must evolve. The federal government should be committed to working closely with Provinces to support a transition away from contract policing." It is in the document that is provided by the federal government. Despite what the members opposite want to do, we're continuing to support rural Albertans in the fight against crime.

Mr. Shepherd: Given the minister is pushing to create a provincial police force with no costing and no details despite repeated requests from rural leaders that he claims he's acting to support and given he's forcing it through with no consultation, not even with the sheriffs that he claims will staff it, and given that's likely why he didn't have a single stakeholder to publicly endorse a provincial police force in Bill 49 and why his debate in this House has mostly been rumours, innuendo, and trash talk about the members of the RCMP, will the minister just admit he has no argument, no justification, and next to no support, just his marching orders from a Premier set on stoking separatism?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, Grande Prairie has transitioned away from the RCMP into their own municipal police service. They have done an in-depth study that shows more oversight, more police officers, better service, and – get this – cheaper, to the tune of almost \$8 million cheaper. This is about providing police service to the people of Alberta. Despite the members opposite and what they don't want to do, what we are going to do is provide that service to the people of Alberta.

Mr. Shepherd: Given that if it's cheaper for Grande Prairie, it's because the minister is subsidizing it with public dollars and given that if the minister wants to improve community safety, there are lots of things he could do like restoring police funding that they've lost thanks to UCP changes to traffic safety or proper funding for local services to help Albertans struggling with housing, mental health, or addiction or restoring funding the UCP has cut for organizations that help prevent crime in their communities but given he and his government refuse to do any of that, will he just admit their only interest is in political posturing, stoking separation to feed their entitlement and deflect and distract from their chaos, cuts, and corruption?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, in Alberta and British Columbia and Saskatchewan and Manitoba and the Atlantic provinces we are approximately 20 per cent short on the authorized strength levels when it comes to police services right across this province. I can tell you that I've had conversations, including with NDP ministers in other provinces who are following suit in what we are doing here in Alberta, and I'm proud to say that I've had those conversations. We're going to continue to support rural Alberta. We're going to continue to make sure that when there is a crime that occurs in rural Alberta, a police officer is attending that call. We're going to augment and support all police services in this province.

The Speaker: Hon. members, a point of order is noted at 2:16 by the hon. the Government House Leader.

AISH Client Benefits

Ms Renaud: I think the push-back of disabled Albertans is getting to the Premier. The Premier's self-righteous, entitled rhetoric on a radio propaganda show this weekend was aimed at disabled Albertans. The Premier bragged that AISH was generous enough at \$1,901 per month, so she didn't really see the need for severely disabled, permanently disabled AISH recipients to keep the new \$200 federal disability benefit. We all know the cost of living is higher for disabled Albertans. Premier, please explain to disabled Albertans why you think, believe they don't deserve to keep \$200.

2:20

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, that's rich coming from the hon. member, who is part of a government who spent zero dollars on indexing AISH. This Premier on this side of the aisle was the first Premier to actually spend money on the indexation of AISH. She has the highest payment anywhere in the country, over \$500 more than most of the provinces, and is spending the most ever when it comes to health benefits for people with disabilities. That side of the House, they talk a lot; they never deliver. This side of the House, under this Premier, we deliver, and we continue to stand with people with disabilities.

Ms Renaud: That's just ridiculous.

Given people with profound disabilities are already drowning in costs and are held back by inaccessibility and chronic unemployment and given this Premier has diverted over \$700,000 to sole-source contracts to political allies, including \$235,000 to Preston Manning and many other failed candidates and friends, and a fancy new red carpet in the Premier's office, Premier, how do you justify stealing \$200 from profoundly disabled Albertans?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:21.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, this government pays almost \$100 more than the federal government calls for. This government has called on the federal government to seriously support our ambition in caring for people with disabilities in this province. Sadly, they have not. Not once in all the years that I've been in this Chamber have I ever seen the Official Opposition stand up and point out that the federal government is not doing their job nor meeting the ambition when it comes to Albertans. That is absolutely outrageous, but it's not surprising. The NDP, who have continued to spend their time shoring up a Liberal-NDP coalition that has sold out this province time and time again, just like every one of their members . . .

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

Ms Renaud: Given the average percentage of AISH income spent on rent is between 75 and 85 per cent, leaving only \$200 to \$400 for food, transportation, meds, and other essentials, and given the new federal disability benefit of \$200 was intended to alleviate deep poverty, why does this government prioritize political patronage over the well-being of disabled Albertans? Why not just reverse the very bad decision and let profoundly, permanently disabled AISH recipients keep the \$200? It costs you nothing.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we're going to continue to be the highest AISH payments in the country, over \$500 more than all of the other provinces inside this province. I'll tell you what we did do. We reversed the NDP's decision not to invest any dollars in indexation. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister is the one with the call.

Mr. Nixon: The NDP, Mr. Speaker, are very, very sad because they continue to be called out for the fact that they sold out disabled Albertans just like they sold out Albertans, and that member in particular, I suspect, is frustrated as their leader works towards trying to turn them into the new Liberal Party here in Alberta and push out the NDP socialists like that member.

Health Services in Rural Alberta

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, Fort McMurray is poised for significant growth with the ever-increasing demand for oil and gas resources along with the appeal of affordable living. However, one critical area that needs further attention is health care. While the opposition continues to spread misinformed claims, I have personally seen the positive changes and substantial improvements from our Ministry of Health. In my constituency of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo we have been fortunate to receive funding for a new urgent care clinic. Can the Minister of Health please elaborate on the plans for the urgent care clinics and how they will help alleviate strains on our local hospitals?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Budget 2025 includes \$15 million in planning funds for new urgent care centres in west Edmonton; south Edmonton; Westview, which is Spruce Grove-Stony Plain; east Calgary; Lethbridge; Medicine Hat; Cold Lake; and, of course, Fort McMurray. These specialized facilities will help to reduce emergency department wait times by providing timely care for unscheduled patients who arrived with unexpected but non life-threatening conditions. We are in the early stages of planning these urgent care centres, and we look forward to planning the one in Fort McMurray.

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

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that improving our health care system is a multifaceted issue and postsecondary institutions such as Keyano College play a key role in ensuring that our health system is supported with the highest trained and educated workforce in the world, given that with our growing population our government continues to increase investments in health care, which all will require a larger workforce, can the Minister of Advanced Ed please elaborate on how institutions like Keyano College are growing and expanding to incorporate medical programming and how this will be beneficial for the entire province of Alberta?

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you very much for that question. We're working very closely with Keyano College and, obviously, the faculty of medicine at the University of Alberta to make sure that we have more options for health facilities in Fort McMurray. I would like to just commend the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo for all of his advocacy because that has definitely helped move this file forward.

Thank you.

Mr. Yao: Well, thank you to the Minister of Advanced Education for that very detailed response. Given that rural health has been a long-standing issue and considering that our government has been working tirelessly to address this challenge through significant investments in the north, it is important to continue its progress. With that in mind, can the Minister of Health provide further insight into what additional rural health initiatives are currently being developed or planned to ensure better access and quality of care for rural communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member. Our government is creating rural medical training opportunities through our partnership with the University of Lethbridge as well as the partnership with Northwestern Polytechnic in Grande Prairie. These regional training centres will act as a hub for medical education and help train health care professionals in surrounding communities. The first class of students in Grande Prairie will begin this year, and once the training expansion is complete in both northern and southern Alberta, an additional 100 homegrown physicians will be ready to practise annually right here in Alberta. This is great news for all Albertans.

Premier's Travel Expenses

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are struggling to put food on the table. They're struggling to pay for higher car insurance after this government let rates go up another 15 per cent. They're struggling with sky-high electricity prices, expensive rents, and every day they tell me how making ends meet on the wages they receive gets harder. So why, when Donald Trump has attacked our jobs, our industries, and our country, would the Premier spend \$10,000 to get a selfie with him at his mansion at Mar-a-Lago?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, we continue to talk about this. I didn't hear a single bit of government policy in that question, but what I did hear are questions about: why is the Premier defending Alberta? Why is the Premier going down to the United States and meeting with elected representatives and appointed members of cabinet, including the President himself, to make the case as to why our \$130 billion relationship with the United States is important? I think

it's ridiculous that the members opposite can't see this for what it is, our Premier doing the job she was elected to do.

Mr. Dach: Given that Donald Trump has attacked Canadians and imposed tariffs that are making life more unaffordable and given he's not backing down, having just announced even more tariffs on our film industry, which creates good jobs in our beautiful province, and given the Premier says all of these attacks are somehow a "big win," does the Premier think that her policies of her government got good value for money spending 10,000 bucks on a rushed trip to cozy up to Trump and take a selfie with him?

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, we've seen significant growth in our world-class film and television sector. We've seen a billion and a half in spends supported by our film and television tax credit, which is one of the best programs in North America. We're always provided that feedback when we meet with producers and directors. We're of course listening to what's been said out of the United States, and we'll continue to evaluate our program to ensure that it remains competitive and remains here to support production in our province.

Mr. Dach: Now, given that Donald Trump's antics likely cost Pierre Poilievre the election and given this Premier would rather schmooze at a mansion called Mar-a-Lago than do anything to get Albertans a better deal for our country and given this wasted 10,000 bucks that cost taxpayers could have been spent better on helping Albertans or even used to pay down her giant \$5 billion deficit, will the Premier apologize for wasting \$10,000 to meet with Donald Trump when that trip got nothing for Albertans? No deal, no jobs, no respect.

2:30

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, the Premier will apologize for nothing. The only people that are owed an apology are Albertans. After the six consecutive credit downgrades that the members opposite were responsible for and the multiple deficits, I find it rich that the NDP have forgotten their own history this fast, that they have the gall to stand in this Chamber and talk about deficits. On this side of the House our Premier will meet with anybody who will help us advance our interests as a province. She continues to meet with the Prime Minister, with the President, elected representatives to make sure everyone understands the important relationship Alberta has with the rest of North America.

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

Rural Crime Prevention and Policing

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's rural communities often feel isolated when it comes to sufficient policing. Long response times and insufficient resources may leave residents feeling vulnerable and unsafe. I previously tabled letters that I received from constituents that raised concerns about safety and security, stating that criminals have more time before policing services arrive on scene. To the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services: how will Bill 49 improve public safety in rural communities across Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of public safety, the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, slow response times and vacancy rates are jeopardizing public safety, especially in rural Alberta. Bill 49 is about offering alternate policing options through

the independent police agency to improve service, address community safety concerns. This will give municipalities and Indigenous communities the right to choose which policing model fits their community best. Albertans have a right to feel safe in their communities, and they have a right to choose what police service better suits their needs.

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

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the challenges faced by rural officers, like limited resources, demonstrate the fact that simply placing more officers in these communities is not enough and given that many rural communities currently rely on a small number of officers to service a large county, increasing the demands placed on law enforcement in these areas, to the same minister: what is our government doing to support rural officers, ensuring they have the supports and resources they need to effectively respond in remote communities?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, of course, our government is committed to supporting the rural crime fight, unlike the members opposite. Do you know that the NDP turned down an emergency debate on rural crime? That's right. When rural Albertans came to this building to voice their concerns about rural crime, the NDP said no to rural Alberta. On this side of the House we're going to continue to add more boots. We're going to add the SCAN teams, fugitive apprehension teams. We're going to add surveillance teams. We're going to continue to make sure that we're supporting rural Albertans and augment supporting all police services in this province.

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

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given Public Safety Canada's report, *A New Policing Vision for Canada: Modernizing the RCMP*, states that the federal government should commit "to working closely with Provinces to support a transition away from contract policing" and given the government of Canada's report transforms the RCMP into a federal policing organization that does not focus on rural municipal policing, to the same minister: what plans are in place to address the expiration of the police services agreement in 2032, which presents the first opportunity of implementation of this phase of policing in Canada?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, we're going to make sure that when somebody calls 911, somebody shows up to that call. That's the number one and first priority that we have. Public Safety Canada is planning to move away from contract policing. In the public safety report, a new policing vision for Canada, it says: "Canada's role in supporting provinces in their delivery of policing services must evolve. The federal government should be committed to working closely with Provinces to support a transition away from contract policing." It would be negligent on my part if I didn't explore all options for all municipalities, and that's precisely what Bill 49 does.

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

Supports for Seniors

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's New Democrats have always worked to make lives better for people in this province. It is why we proposed the role of the Seniors Advocate, indexed income supports, and expanded the seniors' drug benefit. The UCP, on the other hand, well, they would rather give money to their friends like Sam Mraiche than ensure seniors get the medications

they need. Why did the UCP think kicking over 60,000 seniors off a drug benefit was good policy-making?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, we continue to support our seniors. We continue to make sure that they have the health care that they need. In fact, we have one of the most generous programs across the country. We continue to make sure that those seniors are getting their health care. You can qualify as soon as you turn 65. That is what is currently taking place, and that's what will continue going on.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that these cuts have left seniors struggling to make ends meet or, even worse, choosing to forego taking their medications that they desperately need and given that the UCP didn't bat an eye when their good friend Sam Mraiche was given over \$600 million and paid for UCP MLAs to watch hockey games with him and given that the Alberta NDP would never turn their back on seniors, does the minister find seniors' basic needs like life-saving medication too expensive?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, I find that rich coming from a minister who, when she had half of my ministry, seniors and housing, built not a new home for seniors. This side of the House has increased seniors' benefits, has increased money to be invested inside affordable housing, including seniors' housing, and most importantly we're refocusing the health care system to clean up the NDP mess, to make sure that our parents and our grandparents are not stuck lying in acute-care beds but are instead in beautiful seniors' homes and continuing care facilities across our province.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the UCP finds serving the growing seniors' population a troubling ordeal rather than essential government work and given that seniors were better off under the NDP leadership because we cared, we listened, we worked hard, and we created programs that benefited seniors and given that with the UCP it's a bad news story every day, trapped in buildings on holiday weekends, no minimum care hours, co-locating seniors experiencing dementia with young adults, and no eye exams – plus we gave \$1.2 billion for affordable housing – will the minister explain to seniors why this government turned its back?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, they sure announced a lot of money for housing but built none. This side of the aisle has built 5,100 more housing units, 5,100 more on the way, invested in capital maintenance and renewal to make sure that our seniors have a place to live. Unlike the other side of the aisle who continue to force them out of rural Alberta, as an example, into centralized locations, we made sure to build capacity all across the province because this side of the House gets things done. Unfortunately, the NDP did not actually really care. Their actions did not deliver for seniors in this province.

Energy Industry Liability Management

Mr. Schmidt: The UCP is falling short on cleaning up oil and gas liabilities. The mature asset strategy has made it abundantly clear that the government wants to find ways to pay polluters to clean up their mess with public dollars. Albertans have been clear that they expect polluters to pay for their own messes, especially the worst offenders and the Premier's friends. Why is the government intent on raiding the public purse to break the polluter-pay principle that is strongly supported by Albertans across the province?

Mr. Jean: I don't know where the member comes up with these fantasies, but we are very clear. We are not going to use public

dollars to clean up private messes. We know that it happened under the NDP for some period of time when they were in power. That's why I came up with a list of all the great policies that the NDP had during their time in power. Whoops. Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Mr. Jean: We won't take any lessons from them.

The Speaker: It almost looks like the hon. member used a prop. A point of order is noted at 2:39.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that the minister's friend David Yager will be disappointed to hear that his report is a fantasy and given that Alberta could see a significant deficit this fiscal year despite currently strong oil prices and given that we have seen musing around a wide variety of subsidy schemes from royalty credits to carbon credits for the worst offenders in the industry and given that the previous R-star program championed by the Premier was estimated to cost as much as \$20 billion dollars, which programs to create good-paying jobs, improving affordability and health care will the government cut to justify corporate welfare that Albertans reject?

Mr. Jean: None, Mr. Speaker. There is no R-star, but we will clean up the mess that the Death Star is leaving behind, and when I say Death Star, I speak to their policies generally. I've watched for 20 years their incredible policies on destroying economies, and clearly the people of Canada have rejected. They're in such a spiral that the federal party, their bosses, no longer exists. I won't take any lessons from them.

2:40

Mr. Schmidt: Given that upholding the polluter-pay principle is important to protect Albertans from being stuck with the bill for even more liabilities left by the oil and gas industry and given that the total cost of oil and gas liabilities is estimated at about \$260 billion and given that the minister's answers make it clear that he has no interest in taking this problem seriously and given that paying some polluters will just lead to more companies leaving their liabilities to the public purse, can the minister do Albertans the courtesy of telling us right here and right now how much we're going to be on the hook for?

Mr. Jean: Right here and right now, Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you that the public purse is on the hook for zero. That's because we're coming up with programs that the NDP wouldn't have thought of, which is polluters do pay, and here in this province we're blessed with an abundance of wealth. We have the fourth-largest reserve of oil in the world, the ninth-largest reserve of natural gas in the world, a world supply of lithium and titanium and sulphur. We have so much in abundance that we're going to manage it properly. We're going to make polluters pay and do it right. That's unlike what the NDP did.

Federal-provincial Relations

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, since 1967, the year I was born, Alberta has contributed more than \$600 billion net to Confederation through equalization, income taxes, corporate taxes, GST, carbon tax, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, only to be overregulated and restricted by a federal government obsessed with using our hard-earned money to buy votes in eastern Canada. Ottawa continues to trample provincial jurisdiction and target our industries with punitive policies masked as environmental virtue signalling. To the

minister: what steps is this government taking to secure a strong future for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for that question. Our government is working hard to ensure that the future is bright for our children. That's why the Minister of Finance announced a strategy to grow the heritage trust fund by \$250 billion by 2050. It's also why Alberta continues to have the lowest taxes in Canada, and we have ensured that any tax increases will require a referendum. Alberta is the only province attracting young workers, young people here, and it is still the best place in Canada to live, work, and raise a family. It's why, unlike the opposition's time in government, people are actually moving into Alberta in record and unprecedented numbers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that there is a long and well-documented history of jealousy from eastern Canada towards Alberta's success and given that this legacy of resentment has fuelled decades of political interference, policy sabotage, and media disdain and further given that Albertans are tired of being vilified for our prosperity, to the same minister: what constitutional tools will Alberta use to protect our resources and economy from Ottawa's overreach?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, just last week our government announced that we'd be referring the constitutionality of the federal government's recent clean electricity regulations to the Court of Appeal. Canada's constitution is absolutely clear. Provinces have the exclusive jurisdiction over the "development, conservation and management of sites . . . for the generation and production of electrical energy." The ineffective clean electricity regulations will not reduce emissions or benefit Albertans. We're going to challenge them in court.

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

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister again. Given that provinces such as Quebec have set a precedent for exercising provincial autonomy against federal overreach and given that Confederation was never meant to be a parent-child relationship but a partnership instead and given that Alberta along with other western provinces has been treated as a colony by eastern Canada for far too long, to the same minister: how is Alberta working with other provinces whose provincial autonomy is also in jeopardy?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, our government is continuously focused on building connections and opportunities between Alberta and all other provinces, highlighting why Alberta is a partner of choice for trade and investment. We want to see improved economic prosperity here in this province through the removal of barriers and improving trade and investment so that our people, our businesses, and the industries that we have can grow and thrive. This includes working with our western neighbours through strong domestic trading relationships. Alberta is and always will be setting the standards for interprovincial trade, creating a strong and more united Canada.

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

Members' Statements

Red Dress Day

Ms Lovely: Mr. Speaker, May 5 is Red Dress Day, a day that we must come together to stand with survivors, families, individuals, and communities to honour the lives and memories of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit-plus people. The day serves as a solemn reminder and is a collective call to action.

Red Dress Day began in 2010, with a profound red dress art installation by Métis artist Jaime Black, gifted to Alberta's government in 2019 and put in a beautiful display in the Queen Elizabeth II Building. Today countless red dresses are displayed in homes, communities, and public spaces across the country to represent and honour all the Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit-plus people who are missing or who have been murdered. This powerful movement amplifies the voices of Indigenous families, survivors, and advocates who continue to lead the fight for justice for this important cause.

Alberta's government is committed to real and meaningful change, Mr. Speaker. Through the guidance of the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls road map, the work of the Premier's Council on MMIWG2S-plus, and other initiatives, we are taking meaningful action to address the ongoing crisis.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage everyone in Alberta to reflect on the shared responsibility we have to end violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2S-plus people, not just today but every day. I also encourage people across Alberta and this country to participate by wearing red, displaying a red dress in your window, and attending local events to stand in solidarity with families, survivors, and loved ones. Real change is possible if we stand together, taking steps to end this crisis as we strive to build a future rooted in safety, dignity, and respect for all.

Red Dress Day

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: [Singing in Cree] Today we wear a red dress or hang them from our windows as solemn reminders of all the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. We hope and pray that one day our sisters who are missing come home safely. We mourn those of our relatives who were so violently taken from our families, often without justice or ever finding their bodies, which means we don't get to bury them, we don't get to honour them, we don't get to sing them the going home song because we never find them.

This is a national crisis. Alberta leads in incidents of disappearing Indigenous women, ranking among the top four provinces for alerts and the top two for discovered fatalities. There are complex reasons for why the figures are so high in Alberta specifically, from the residual impacts of settler colonialism and misogyny to the intersecting issues of complex health needs facilitated by a housing crisis and accelerated by an opioid epidemic, blanketed by the cultural intolerance of homophobia and transphobia that leans its bigoted weight on our queer, trans, and two-spirited loved ones.

I wish I had the power to stop our sisters from being stolen and from going missing, to alleviate the pain that our families and our communities face. But for today we will pause. We will wear a red dress and put tobacco down and our prayers up, especially for those of our relatives who are yet to come home.

Hay-hay, all my relations.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore has a statement to make.

2:50

80th Anniversary of the Liberation of the Netherlands

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On May 5, 1945, the Netherlands was liberated from Nazi occupation, marking the end of the Second World War in the country. Today marks the 80th anniversary of that event. Today I pay tribute to the First Canadian Army for leading the liberation of the Netherlands and to the over 7,600 Canadians who made the ultimate sacrifice and remain buried there. Today I remember this history not just as pages of the archives but as my family's story.

All four of my grandparents grew up during the war, and they still remember the trials endured under Nazi oppression. They were forced to house Nazi soldiers. My opa had to hide for over a year to avoid being taken as a forced labourer for German factories. They bravely helped to hide people who the Nazis wanted to kill, at great personal risk to themselves. Later in the war the Germans opened the dikes to try to stop the Allied troops from defeating them. My family was displaced, split up, and their homes destroyed. When the Dutch revolted, the Nazis cut off food and fuel, triggering the Hunger Winter. Desperation drove many to extreme measures, and 22,000 civilians died of starvation that winter.

Five years of occupation; five years of terror, danger, and oppression; five years of hunger, hatred, and hurt, and then, finally, came the Canadians. With the Canadian troops came hope, freedom, life. They liberated my family. In our family's records it is written: the war came to an end, and it was with much unity and manpower that the land and people were able to look beyond the bleak reality of what their country had become. Within a decade they left their war-torn home in search of a better future in a new land. They chose Canada.

Today we thank those Canadian soldiers for their bravery and sacrifice. Today we honour their legacy not just as a matter of history but a personal reality. Their valour gave my family life and gave me a future. From the depths of my family's story and my own heart, I am forever grateful.

Thank you.

Anniversary of 2015 Provincial Election

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, 10 years ago today Alberta's New Democrats formed government for the first time in the province's history. We were a government of conviction, one that increased Alberta's minimum wage to \$15 an hour. Today's youth wage is \$13 an hour, and \$15 an hour is the lowest in Canada. We were a government that cared about people, that increased supports for AISH in the face of an economic downturn. Today under the UCP Albertans wait half a year for AISH approvals, and children with disabilities wait years to access early intervention services.

We were a government that fought for the environment and listened to experts, creating a climate leadership plan. Today the UCP makes climate policy that favours coal mining over stewards of our land and water. We were a government that built over 230 schools. Under the UCP we have no new schools and classrooms with 40 children. We built the Calgary cancer centre, while the UCP refuses to build any additional hospitals.

But more than anything, this government is just plainly corrupt, from red carpets in the Premier's office, new china for gala dinners, and trips to the United States paid for by taxpayers. The corrupt care scandal is so big that members of the UCP caucus are stepping away and openly calling for a public inquiry.

All the while the deficit is exploding, the health care system is crumbling, and education is a mess. It's so grim that they have to rile

their base with hysteria and irresponsible separatist talk to distract Albertans while also ignoring their treaty obligations. After six years of this UCP, can Albertans say they're better off? Absolutely, no, Mr. Speaker.

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

Health System Reform Public Consultation

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every day Alberta's government is getting closer to providing better health care for all Albertans when and where they need it. In November of 2023, when our government announced plans to refocus Alberta's health care system into one that Albertans deserve, we knew that we could not walk this path alone. Collaboration became a guiding principle in this work, and our government is committed to maintaining open lines of communication with all Albertans and front-line staff.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans were encouraged to share their insights, feedback, and experiences to inform and challenge decision-making. Last year Alberta held 65 in-person public engagement sessions throughout the province with health care workers, patients, caregivers, and regional partners. Additional sessions were also held for Indigenous and French communities. These results have helped form our new provincial health agencies, health corridors, and other important structural elements of Alberta's improved health care system.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, the same communities were revisited again this year. Albertans were updated on the important work that has occurred. They were invited to continue the conversations, to share their perspectives on access to health care, their experiences as health care workers to identify opportunities and improve local decision-making. Along with hosting 63 in-person sessions this round, Alberta Health has incorporated online virtual feedback tools so that every Albertan has the opportunity to be heard.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the 30,000 health care professionals and Albertans who have provided their input on health system refocusing so far. They share our government's belief in a better health care system for everyone in our province, and their participation has helped make it a reality.

Thank you.

Anniversary of 2015 Provincial Election

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, 10 years ago today Albertans said enough with Tory land and yes to a new approach to government by electing Rachel Notley and the Alberta New Democrats. On May 5, 2015, Albertans said yes to a government that got things done for this province.

They said yes to getting rid of dark money from our politics and putting people first. They said yes to reducing child poverty, and we proudly did it, Mr. Speaker, by cutting child poverty in half. They said yes to increasing the minimum wage so that workers have dignity and a few bucks in their pockets at the end of a long shift. They said yes to protecting public health services like health care and education from cuts. They said yes to protecting our province's air, land, and water, ensuring protecting the environment and growing the economy go hand in hand. They said yes to respect for our arts, our thriving music and film and television scenes and making our province a world-class culture and tourism destination. They said yes to increasing AISH and ensuring disabled Albertans have dignity and services they need to thrive. They said yes to diversifying our industries, supporting our energy sectors, and being there to support our vibrant job creators, even as the global price of oil plummeted. They said yes to turning back the tide of Tory land from decades of unethical, incompetent government.

Mr. Speaker, our government did things for Albertans every day, and I and our colleagues are immensely proud of it. We will never apologize for our record of putting Albertans first. We hold our heads high that we ran an ethical, competent government. That's the kind that Albertans deserve now. They don't want one mired in political interference, kickbacks, and the worst corruption scandal of our province's history. Today, on our 10-year anniversary of Rachel Notley's election as Premier, we look in the mirror and know that when we reflect on our record, we know better is indeed possible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, do you have a notice of motion?

Ms Hoffman: I sure do. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice that at the appropriate time under Standing Order 42 I intend to move the following motion.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to acknowledge the seriousness of the measles outbreak in Alberta after the largest single-week increase in reported cases since the outbreak began in 2024, condemn antivaccine misinformation on the safety of vaccines and the seriousness of measles, develop and release a robust plan to increase Alberta's rate of immunization, and increase Alberta's trust in public health by restoring the ability of the chief medical officer of health to issue regular updates on measles vaccines and other public health matters.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have 16 letters and releases. I will not speak to the content of each one, but I will acknowledge the sender and the people making the release. I have the Onion Lake Cree Nation, Blackfoot Confederacy, Piikani Nation, Saddle Lake Cree Nation, Suncild First Nation, Peerless Trout First Nation, Beaver First Nation, the four nations of Maskwacis – Samson band, Montana, Ermineskin, Louis Bull – Kehewin Cree Nation, Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations, Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta, Treaty 7 First Nations Chiefs Association, and the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations, who have all released their notice about separatism concerns in this province, particularly keeping notice of the fact that these are treaty lands and that the Premier and this government must be aware of their responsibilities.

3:00

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

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the press release from the Assembly of First Nations, who are marking the national day of awareness for missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQ-plus peoples. They're demanding action on the MMIWG calls for action, calls for justice, and that includes Alberta, where there's a lot of work to be done. I'm urging the UCP government to take those calls for justice seriously today and every day.

Motions under Standing Order 42

The Speaker: Hon. members, the time is now 3 o'clock, and that means we move to Orders of the Day. However, immediately prior

to that, we will hear the Standing Order 42 that was moved during Notices of Motions by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: To confirm, I have five minutes, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Correct.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you.

Measles Outbreak in Alberta

Ms Hoffman:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to acknowledge the seriousness of the measles outbreak in Alberta after the largest single-week increase in reported cases since the outbreak began in 2024, condemn antivaccine misinformation on the safety of vaccines and the seriousness of measles, develop and release a robust plan to increase Alberta's rate of immunization, and increase Alberta's trust in public health by restoring the ability of the chief medical officer of health to issue regular updates on measles vaccines and other public health matters.

Ms Hoffman: I rise pursuant to the standing order to request that the ordinary business of the Legislature be adjourned to debate the motion that's urgent and pressing. I'd like to acknowledge that pursuant to the standing order I will provide members with a copy of the motion, which I have.

Now for the reference to urgency. Just over this weekend, Mr. Speaker, we saw the number of cases rise by 55. The government had a press conference this morning at I believe it was 9 a.m., and by noon we knew that there were 55 more cases than the government was referring to in their press conference earlier today. Alberta is experiencing a significant outbreak. Measles was once eradicated in Alberta. It was actually 1998 when we had no cases of measles. Under the UCP we've seen measles once again on the rise, putting Alberta children at risk of serious complications from pneumonia, brain swelling, long-term health, and even permanent disability or death.

As of this morning there were 154 cases in southern Alberta, 75 in the central region, 20 in the north, 10 in Calgary, and six in Edmonton. That's an increase in southern Alberta of almost 50 just since the weekend. In the past three days we've seen these numbers continue to grow. Three Alberta children, it's confirmed now, are in the intensive care unit. Measles primarily affects children and teenagers. We know that of these 265 cases, 144 of them were children that were school aged; 77 were ages five and younger.

Health professionals are working seriously to contain the spread, focusing on contact tracing and vaccine efforts, but it is important that we all take this seriously, Mr. Speaker. In 1997, when the work was done to eradicate measles, it was a major, country-wide public health campaign, and the world worked diligently to make sure that these rates were addressed and that immunizations were made more available.

Just so that everyone knows, because I imagine that people are saying, "Well, there's measles in other parts of the world," and that is absolutely true. But to put this in context, Mr. Speaker, Alberta has as of today 58 per million Albertans in terms of cases. Texas, which we know is under a significant outbreak, has about half that, 23 per million people. New York State: .02 per million people. Romania is higher at 1,400 per million people. South Korea has only 1 per million people. Ethiopia, 540 per million people. So there are significant swings around the world. I want us to get to the South Korea numbers or, better yet, the New York State numbers, but this is a long way from where we are today.

We know that the best way, the proven way that we did address this in the past, Mr. Speaker, was through major public health

efforts, including those here in the Legislature. So being able to stop the business of the day today to say how important it is for all of us to be out in our communities, rolling up our own sleeves, and modelling this behaviour – I do want to thank the minister for talking about, as she always regularly says, immunizations or being immunized. I will straight up say it's vaccines. We need vaccines in our communities. You can develop immunities through other ways, but during the COVID pandemic we saw people throwing COVID parties to spread COVID around so that they could develop natural immunities. That was incredibly dangerous and resulted in people going to hospital and some potentially even losing their lives.

We know that these vaccines are long proven and incredibly safe. Dr. Joffe, now that he isn't the chief medical officer of health, has been speaking out more about measles, and he made it very clear that the science that has been overwhelmingly disproven around misinformation that was spread by many folks in positions of power has no basis to it, that it is absolutely safe, it is absolutely proven.

For anyone who had their childhood immunizations before 1997, I want to encourage you – I imagine many of us in this Chamber were immunized before '97 – to call 811 or talk to your family doctor and get a second dose. It's the best way to protect yourself and to protect all of the other people around you. The minister did recognize this morning that 95 per cent immunity is required for us to have herd immunity, and we still have so much more to do to get there, Mr. Speaker, particularly with young populations.

Just earlier this year, in March, when we were debating the budget, I specifically asked about specific zones in the province that had really low immunization rates for children two and under, particularly the High Level region, who only had 10 per cent immunization at that point. We've been urging the government to talk about this more publicly for months. The former chief medical officer of health made it clear that he's been talking about this with government for a year. I am glad that there was an announcement today that there will be more campaigns. This should have happened a year ago. It needs to happen faster, more rigorously, and more seriously by the government and all members of this Assembly. So please grant unanimous consent so we can get on with it, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 42 allows for a member of Executive Council to provide a response of up to five minutes should they wish to do so. It appears the hon. Minister of Health is rising.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise and speak on this very important subject. Since the first confirmed cases in early March of this year our government has been monitoring the current measles outbreaks very closely, working with public health officials to improve vaccination access and following their expert advice on the situation. As of today we do have a total of 265 cases of measles in the province, with the vast majority of those cases being in the south and central zones, with a combined case count of 229 in the south and central zones.

It is concerning that 221 of the cases in Alberta are impacting children under the age of 18 years. As a mother and a grandmother myself I feel for the parents and guardians of those children, having to watch their children deal with this horrible virus. I know myself, with having seven children, all seven of my children are immunized for the measles. Of course, we need to make sure that all parents have the information that they need right across this province, and that's what we're doing, Mr. Speaker. I want to say to all of the parents that we are with you and with your children. We know they're going to be well taken care of if, in fact, they ever need to

see a doctor or nurse within our health care system due to the measles. But the best thing that they can do is to be immunized.

We know, and I want to be really clear that getting immunized against measles is the single most important thing you can do to protect you, your loved ones, and your community. We know that this vaccine and immunization is extremely effective. We've known that for decades. As of April 26 almost 90 per cent of all the cases that were confirmed in Alberta were of individuals who were unimmunized. It's vital that we do our part to protect the vulnerable groups by staying up to date on immunizations.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to recognize the good work of our public health teams and their ongoing communications with Albertans. This has led to an overall increase in immunizations for measles right across the province. In fact, for example, between the weeks of March 16 and April 20 32,302 vaccines have been administered. That is a 67 per cent increase from last year in the same time period. We also know that by the age of 13 approximately 90 per cent of children have had two doses of the measles vaccine, and by the time they reach the age of 17, that climbs to 93 per cent. But we know more has to be done.

Starting today, access to measles immunizations is being expanded at central and south zone clinics, with the hope that it will speed up how long it takes to get immunized so more people are protected and quicker. Again, we have ramped up those clinics, but we're going to ramp them up even further, as I said earlier in the day. Measles is not a mild illness. It's highly contagious and can lead to serious complications, particularly for children under five years of age and vulnerable Albertans in general. The measles vaccine is highly effective, as I said earlier, in preventing infection and complications and has a long proven track record of safety. Next week our government will be launching an expanded advertising campaign to help get the information out to all Albertans in a much broader way.

Right now, Mr. Speaker, we have a social media campaign under way that encourages Albertans to check their immunization records to ensure they're protected against the measles. We're also preparing to launch a broader campaign in the next week which will include radio, print, digital, and expanded social media advertising. We're making sure that we're getting it far and wide. The campaign is simple: Don't Get Measles. Get Immunized. As part of this campaign we're developing a tool kit for daycare providers to help ensure parents have the information they need to protect their children. We will also have more to share on this and have plans to communicate with child care operators when the tool kit is ready, as to where they can find it.

3:10

To help reach as many Albertans as possible, we've also translated the products into over 14 languages, Mr. Speaker, because we know it's important to make sure that individuals hear it in their own language. Starting today, Health Link 811 is also introducing a dedicated measles hotline. Albertans seeking information about measles can fast-track their call through Health Link by calling 1.844.944.3434. The measles hotline will speed up access to a professional who can assist with accessing your immunization records or general information, provide advice for those experiencing measles symptoms or feeling unwell, and assist with booking measles immunization appointments or locating a public health clinic offering immunization in your area. Again, you can see that Alberta's government is taking every possible step to bring measles under control.

Mr. Speaker, I want to remind all Albertans – this is so important – make sure you have your immunizations up to date.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: That brings us to points of order. At 2:16 the hon. the Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise on Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j) in relation to the comments made by the Member for Edmonton-City Centre. At approximately 2:16 p.m. the member raised three questions to the minister. The first one involved a question relating to the minister of public safety, but in it the Member for Edmonton-City Centre said, "It's about the UCP's desperate need to pick fights [in order] to distract from their own incompetence and corruption and the Premier's open flirtation with separation." That's when the point of order was called. In the subsequent supplemental the member said, "just... marching orders from a Premier set on stoking separatism." In the second supplemental that same member said, referring to the minister of public safety: will he just admit their only interest is political posturing, stoking separatism?

Mr. Speaker, you've weighed in on these words before. On April 30, 2025, your words were "I think that, largely speaking, referring to individuals as separatists in this Assembly is going to consistently lead to disorder." I would submit the same has happened here today. On three separate occasions the member referred to two members of the government caucus as either stoking separatism or flirting with separatism. Those are neither true nor accurate. Neither the Premier nor the minister of public safety has ever stoked, flirted, or said anything about separatism other than the comments that were made before this Assembly.

You did, at that time, Mr. Speaker, on April 30, 2025, ask the member in question in that point of order to stand up and apologize. I would respectfully ask that you do the same here.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would disagree with the hon. minister. I do not believe this is a point of order but a matter of debate. I will note that at no point in any of my questions did I accuse any individual in this Chamber of being a separatist. What I did say – and the minister was quite correct, I did refer to the Premier's open flirtation with separation. The *Oxford English Dictionary's* definition of flirtation: a short period of casual experimentation with or interest in a particular idea or activity.

I would note – now, I could understand, perhaps, contesting the word "short" there, in that I can quote an article from September 14, 2023, in *Maclean's* magazine, *The Unsteady Reign of Danielle Smith*, in which they stated...

The Speaker: Order. Order. The use of a proper name under any circumstances would be inappropriate.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that correction. I apologize and withdraw.

The Unsteady Reign of [the Premier], in which the article states, "But [the Premier] is no longer catering to the separatists of yore – prairie pioneers and octogenarian professors. She is pandering to a more volatile generation of revolutionaries motivated by misinformation and rage." Headline from the *Tyee*, April 9: *Who Needs Canadian Unity? [The Premier] Plays with Separation*. CBC Calgary, May 1: *[The Premier's] Reform is Nudging Alberta Separation Vote from 'If' Toward 'When'*. The *Winnipeg Free Press*, May 2: *Alberta Premier's Talk of Separation a Political Ploy and a Dangerous Distraction*.

Mr. Speaker, I would say that this is clearly a matter of debate. There are many who have taken the Premier's remarks or actions and certainly her choices in Bill 54 to lower the threshold for a referendum on separation to indicate that the Premier is indeed stoking or providing greater opportunity for folks who are pursuing separatism, folks who are looking at separation here in the province of Alberta. This is what I was speaking to. I do not believe it is a point of order but a matter of debate, but I will accept your ruling.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others?

I am prepared to rule, and I do have the benefit of the Blues. Hon. members, both members who have made submissions this afternoon have accurately reflected what the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre said, particularly when he said, "the Premier's open flirtation with separation." The hon. deputy House leader for the government does highlight the ruling that your Speaker made on April 30 when then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning said the following: "Let's be clear. The Premier is a separatist."

At that time I took some length to discuss the difference between calling someone a separatist and having discussion around the matter of separation. I have the great sense that over the coming days this particular topic will be that of much debate, and just because something isn't a point of order today doesn't mean it wouldn't necessarily be a point of order tomorrow, as I have stated on numerous occasions.

In today's case I am of the opinion that the hon. member was trying to debate a matter and not calling the Premier a separatist directly, and as such this isn't a point of order but a matter of debate. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Hon. members, at 2:21 the Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This point of order raises Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j) once again. It relates to comments made by the Member for St. Albert. The question that the member put forward was: "Premier, how do you justify stealing \$200 from profoundly disabled Albertans?" I would submit to you that this language is highly inflammatory. It is completely false, and it is completely unbecoming of any member of this Assembly to accuse another of stealing. The member may disagree with the policy that has been put forward by this government but ought not to accuse anyone, let alone the Premier, of committing a crime in this Assembly.

I'll take you back some time, Mr. Speaker, to provide you with a little precedent on what your predecessors have ruled in this area as well. On February 23, 1960, the member was accused of stealing. The Speaker at that time said that the word "stealing" has significance beyond that of alleging that somebody is depriving, for example. It is improper language for this Assembly. I would submit to you that the member should get up and apologize for that. It is just simply inflammatory language that has no place in this Assembly.

Thank you.

Ms Renaud: I apologize and withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I accept your apology. You are correct; you cannot accuse a member of stealing in the Assembly. The matter is dealt with and concluded.

Finally, the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall rose at 2:39 on a point of order.

Point of Order Exhibits

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At that time the minister of energy was asked a question by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, a serious question about the government's position on the polluter-pay principle. Instead of taking that question seriously, the minister of energy was making use of props. You have said on many occasions that the use of props is not appropriate in the Legislature. At that point you also interjected, showed your displeasure on that. I think it's not in order to use props in the Legislature.

3:20

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, this is clearly not a point of order. The hon. minister of energy was not making use of props. My recollection was that he was holding a piece of paper in his hand, a blank one at that, to highlight the NDP's contributions to this province, and he showed Albertans all across this province what those were. That's not a point of order – he was making a point; this was a matter of debate – and I would submit to you that it should not be seen as one.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the benefit of the Blues are not required. I am prepared to rule unless there are other submissions. As I mentioned, at the time in question of 2:39 I said, "It almost looks like the hon. member used a prop." Now, a very lengthy and unnecessary debate or argument could take place in this Assembly as to whether or not a piece of paper could in fact be a prop, so to prevent such lengthy debates, I'll provide a caution to the hon. Minister of Energy and Minerals to keep in mind the appropriateness of the use of props or not. I don't consider this to be a point of order, merely a caution for the hon. minister. I consider the 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 211

Arts and Creative Economy Advisory Council Act

[Debate adjourned April 28: Member Ceci speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has four minutes remaining in his debate.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll use those four minutes wisely, I think. The establishment of an Arts and Creative Economy Advisory Council Act would mark a significant step toward integrating the arts into the broader economic and social fabric of Alberta.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Why is that important? Well, just earlier today the minister of arts and culture was speaking to reporters, and one of the points she made to reporters was the importance of diversifying our economy and ensuring that we have a robust, broad economy that can withstand perhaps drops in the price of oil. She talked about the importance of the hundreds of millions of dollars that come into this province when film and TV come here to use our facilities, our locations, and our trained staff, people who can help create all that. The arts and creative economy council would be a place where that kind of information, that kind of advocacy can take place, to talk

about the importance of a broad-based economy and what film and television brings to it.

I'm proposing that this council, based on consultation with artists and cultural leaders, would serve as a strategic body made up of at least seven members from five separate creative industries, with gender and cultural and geographic representation. You can read more about those seven areas in this bill. It's in my social media posts and in my links in that post; Linktree, I believe. The participants on this council would be experts from across the province in the creative industry. Like I said, there'd be an emphasis on Indigenous members and marginalized communities. If it's passed, it would make recommendations to the minister on areas that support the sustainability and growth of the arts and creative economy in Alberta. They'd weigh in on areas like policy development, sector support, economic integration, community engagement. All of that would make the best of the ongoing investments in arts that take place currently.

Madam Speaker, the artisan and cultural leaders want a seat at the table where they would be able to give their advice and direction on what is in the best interests of developing the sector so that it can be more robust in terms of enhancing our economy. A really good example of this in other parts of Canada includes an agency in Ontario called Ontario Creates. That's a one-stop shop for creators or people who want to develop their expertise in the arts. It's a comprehensive approach to how the arts can form a solid anchor in developing their economy, and they've got numerous success stories on their website. I encourage all people to go to that to take a look at it.

Support for growth in the arts, as I said, would be helpful in times of economic downturn in this province. If, again, we go through a period of low oil brought on by a collapse in the global price of oil...

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

Ms Fir: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today in opposition to Bill 211, Arts and Creative Economy Advisory Council Act, tabled by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. I do so not because we disagree on the importance of Alberta's creative economy – on the contrary, our government champions it – but because the bill is unnecessary, redundant, and rooted in fundamental misunderstanding of the strong, proven infrastructure already in place and delivering real outcomes for Alberta's creative industries.

Bill 211 proposes another council, another set of reports, another drain on administrative time, taxpayer dollars, and public resources, all to replicate work that is already under way in delivering results. Bill 211 proposes establishing a new arts and creative economy advisory council to assess existing government supports for the arts, recommend ways to reduce barriers and costs, advise on talent development and marketing, and create a new arts and creative economy action plan. Madam Speaker, these are not new goals. They are already being accomplished right now through established programs and organizations like the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, the AFA, the Alberta Film Commission, and my Ministry of Arts, Culture and Status of Women. It appears that what we have here is duplication dressed up as direction, wearing nothing more than unnecessary red tape.

Our government's record on arts and cultural investment is not only strong; it's historic. Let's talk about results for a moment. The AFA is a proven efficient structure that distributes funding to both individual artists and larger organizations. The AFA isn't just meeting these expectations; it's exceeding them. It assesses funding frameworks, engages directly with stakeholders, conducts equity-

driven strategies, supports Indigenous, deaf, culturally diverse, and francophone artists with intentionality and respect, and supports artistic development across every discipline. It also manages Canada's largest provincial art collection, facilitates outreach to travelling exhibitions, and incorporates performance measurement and sector engagement as part of its daily work. It is independent, transparent, responsive, and delivering results.

As for Bill 211's call for an annual report, this is already being done every year by the AFA. The standing annual report details grant distributions, audited financials, performance metrics, and outreach initiatives. That's not a report on what could be; that's action, impact, and leadership. Bill 211, on the other hand, brings zero new dollars to the table for artists, just new layers of bureaucracy, new administrative overhead, new strategy obligations, and new reporting requirements, diverting resources away from artists and into administration.

Bill 211 speaks to the creative economy. But, Madam Speaker, allow me to highlight what a thriving creative economy looks like in action under this government's leadership. Through the Alberta Film Commission in my Ministry of Arts, Culture and Status of Women and the film and television tax credit through Jobs, Economy and Trade Alberta has become a global destination for screen productions. *The Last of Us*, filmed here in Alberta, was not only a creative milestone; it was an economic one, contributing \$182 million to Alberta's economy and creating nearly 1,500 full-time jobs. *Heartland*, Canada's longest running family drama, is still going strong, highlighting our beautiful province. And the award-winning docuseries *Push*, developed by Alberta's own Fenix Film & Television, is changing national narratives around accessibility.

3:30

For music: over the last three years our government has made consistent, meaningful investments in Alberta's music sector, with an average annual investment of nearly \$15 million supporting musicians, festivals, industry nonprofits, and sound recording companies. Through our music organization operating grant we empower organizations to do what they do best: developing, producing, licensing, releasing, promoting, and distributing sound recordings that elevate Canadian artists.

A few examples of the impacts made possible in part by our existing programs include Royalty Records. Canada's oldest country label and the second-oldest independent record company received nearly \$35,000 in 2024-25 to continue to champion Canadian artists like Hillside Outlaws, The Goddamsels, Mike Plume, and Orchid Sky while also preserving the legacies of Canadian legends such as Bev Munro, Jimmy Arthur Ordge, Joyce Smith, R. Harlan Smith, Chris Nielsen, and George Fox. Chronograph Records, a proud Albertan sound recording company, received over \$13,000 through a music organization operating grant and \$20,000 through the cultural industries organization project grant.

Through the cultural industries initiatives grant Stagehand, a web-based platform connecting artists and venues, received over \$19,000 in 2024-2025 to establish a yearlong live performance initiative at South Health Campus in Calgary showcasing Calgary-based emerging artists. Prior to this yearlong initiative I approved over \$11,000 in 2023 for a South Health Campus pilot project offering cultural performances, hosting 10 performances and reaching a total of 594 combined audience members. The results of this pilot spoke volumes, with 96 per cent of patients, visitors, and staff reporting a positive impact from the experience.

Our work is being recognized, as seen by our success with the 2023 Juno awards, the 2024 Canadian Country Music awards, and a nearly \$26 million capital investment into the Winspear Centre for expansion and innovation and \$103 million to Arts Commons

in Calgary, the largest cultural infrastructure project in Canadian history, in the member opposite's riding.

Madam Speaker, let's not forget about the Alberta music action plan, our own government-led initiative that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo himself praised during government estimates on March 19. He said: "In the business plan key objective 1.2 relates to developing a strategy to grow Alberta's music industry and establish an Alberta music commission. I think that's great." So it appears the member opposite would agree. These are not ideas on paper; these are strategic investments producing real cultural and economic impacts.

Our investments are delivering results, so when Bill 211 proposes to establish a new council to attempt to do what is already being done and done well, our question is simple: why? The answer, Madam Speaker, it appears would be that the member opposite must not grasp or understand what is already being done in our artistic and creative economy, or perhaps the same member has overadmired the work of the AFA because, I must admit, the most outstanding aspect here is the irony and imitation threaded throughout this bill.

Just to name a few more examples of this overlap. Section 9 of Bill 211 proposes a plan to "reduce financial and administrative barriers" while simultaneously creating more administrative overhead and directly contradicting the purpose of my work as minister with the AFA, as explicitly outlined in the AFA Act section 6(b), "to avoid duplication of effort and expense." Again, in section 6(1) and (6) Bill 211 calls for the Lieutenant Governor to appoint new council members. Section 7 outlines the proposed remuneration and expenses protocol all while these exact governance protocols already exist nearly verbatim, nearly word for word, under the AFA Act sections 7 and 8.

I can go on. We're being asked to duplicate salaries, secretariat services, processes, and advisory functions all while our existing structure is not only functioning but flourishing and expanding. Bill 211 contradicts the very structure it's meant to complement. It doesn't streamline; it entangles. It doesn't empower; it overreaches. The real impact of Bill 211 would not be to advance the arts but to delay and distract from the work that's already making a difference. This is not how effective governments operate and not how our government supports the arts. We believe in funding and investing in the arts, not funding and investing in administration, and we believe in results, not red tape.

To summarize, Madam Speaker, Bill 211 is redundant with the work already being done by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, the Alberta Film Commission, the Alberta media fund, and the Alberta music action plan. It is also redundant with the mandate letter I received from the Premier. As a reminder, I don't need a new council to obtain record levels of funding for the AFA, nor did I need a new council to take action on a new music action plan, and I certainly don't need one to fulfill my mandate. I've heard from artists, nonprofit organizations, film and television producers, and many Albertans about the value of arts and culture, and that's why our government is already taking meaningful action and making real progress. We are delivering funding, removing barriers, and growing the sector without needing new legislation to do it.

Madam Speaker, supporting Alberta's creative industries is not just a cultural priority; it's an economic one. But we must do so strategically, not symbolically. Bill 211 is not a pathway to progress. It's a blueprint for a bloated government and a detour into duplication.

Ultimately, we don't need Bill 211. We need to continue to do what works and have the discipline to say no to what doesn't. That is why our government opposes Bill 211. We're already doing the real work and investments, and we're doing it well, building a stronger, more vibrant, creative economy for Alberta, and we intend to keep doing so the right way.

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

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm standing in support of this brilliant Bill 211, the Arts and Creative Economy Advisory Council Act, which is especially needed now, put forward by my good friend the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. It is needed because across this province the arts are struggling. I know I just heard from the minister saying that there is historic investment, but since the UCP formed government the first three budgets of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts were cut by 14 per cent, whereas under an NDP government the Alberta Foundation for the Arts saw an increase of 18 per cent.

Here in Edmonton, the city of festivals, many of those festivals are not making ends meet. We see fundraising being the next avenue for supporting their events, and, sadly, where the government should be standing up and supporting cultural festivities, these festivals are choosing between holding the event or cancelling them, as the Saskatoon Fringe Festival had to choose this year in our neighbouring province of Saskatchewan. Madam Speaker, this bill would address these important festivals because artists and those connected with the arts would be counselling this government to provide them through the arts and creative economy advisory council. While I hear the minister saying that there are conversations being had with artists and with organizers, sadly we are not seeing the corresponding investment. In fact, that is why this bill is absolutely necessary.

Culture in Alberta generates \$5.3 billion dollars, and Albertans seek out cultural experiences and participate on average in 2.5 cultural activities monthly. We are the fourth highest in Canada compared to Quebec at 2.8, Prince Edward Island at 2.8 as well, and British Columbia at 2.7. That shows an Alberta that loves their cultural experiences. In Alberta culture creates 53,739 annual jobs for Albertans, and at least 75.9 per cent of Albertans attend or participate in arts events and activities. Here in Edmonton I'm sure that number is much more inflated. Madam Speaker, I say that I'm one of those Albertans, and I am a proud Edmontonian who accesses these festivals to expand our cultural vibrance across the province and indeed in our major centres.

From all cultures and Albertans from all walks of life to the different representatives that would be included in the council, including live performance, visual and applied arts, written and published works, et cetera, the council would be able to help this government. I know that they would like to pontificate about the work that they are doing, but unfortunately at this point we are hearing from these festivals and these organizers that things are dire.

3:40

As a Nehiyaw I cannot stress enough the importance of including the creatives in this process, and I don't just say this because some of my cousins and close friends are connected with these industries but because our beautiful province is enhanced, and such vibrance attracts people to our province not just as tourists – that's also very commendable – but also as folks who want to call this place home.

Madam Speaker, I want to talk really briefly about one of my most favourite festivals in this beautiful city, Edmonton, of which there are many. My colleagues on this side of the House, especially the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, know that this is my most favourite festival all year. That's the Edmonton Fringe Festival. Our Fringe was the first in North America and remains the largest, longest running Fringe festival on the continent. It is one accolade that we must recognize doesn't get enough attraction, or we don't talk about it enough.

Annually we welcome here in Edmonton more than 750,000 visits to the Fringe Festival alone. It drives \$20 million in economic impact to our city. It engages 1,000 volunteers. It supports more than 1,600 artists. It also creates more than 250 jobs for the almost month-long festival, and that's every year. Plus, Fringe delivers \$1.3 million in annual ticket sales straight into the pockets of artists, a practice unique to the Fringe Festival movement.

Last year, because of the dwindling funding included by this government, the Fringe Festival launched the sustain Fringe fundraising program. It started off with 34 monthly donors and has now jumped up to 530 since it was launched. This includes – and Madam Chair, I think this is actually brilliant, but it's a bit crass of a fundraiser, so if there's some parliamentary language that you need to call me on, feel free to. The Fringe Festival is putting on a fundraiser where patrons have the opportunity to sponsor a porta-potty, and they get to affix a name of their choosing to these vestibules, how about. Is that more parliamentary, Madam Speaker? It's to name a vestibule. I am certain that there is many an Albertan who gets to participate in Fringe in a new way.

Madam Speaker, these are costs that are oftentimes not accorded for with respect to funding. We need to have artists and organizers at the table to be able to share the types of needs that their festivals and their cultural activities are bringing to our province, and these are costs that are not foreseen. I think it is quite a brilliant way to get around the need for additional dollars. But we also have to acknowledge that we are in an affordability crisis where Albertans are already at the limit in which they are trying to make ends meet and yet are having to donate their hard-earned dollars to support festivals alongside purchasing tickets, and showing up to these wonderful festivals in our city and across the province is another added cost. This government, we have a responsibility to support our communities and ensure that these festivals and these cultural activities are adequately supported, and having them at the table is so important to do that.

Along with that vestibule of a fundraiser, they're also going to include hand-washing stations at these same vestibules.

Madam Speaker, those 530 patrons who are already donating to the Fringe Festival: we need to also think about them. So not only would I urge the government to consider supporting a cost of living anything – we'll take legislation; we'll take actual work to bring down the bills of Albertans – but we also need to think about how we're spending money, and we have to be very conscious about what money is going where.

Right now we know that these smaller local artists are struggling under current decisions of the government. Large scales are being prioritized at a disproportionate level to the detriment of small local venues and local artists. We see in both Edmonton and Calgary – and I'll stick to my city, the great city of Edmonton, the city of champions – the UCP announced a \$106 million funding agreement with the Oilers Entertainment Group. We're going to take the cup this year, so I think it's a good investment. But we also have to acknowledge that there are smaller venues that are going to be struggling, so we need to have these folks at the table to ensure that they're taking into account when government funding is considered.

I'd like to thank the members here today for listening to me talk about the importance of Bill 211, and I'd now like to sit. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, are you standing to speak?

Mr. Dyck: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you so very much, Madam Speaker. I really appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 211. For starters, I just want to set the stage here a little bit and speak about some of the history in the arts and in music. I deeply care about the arts, I deeply care about music, and I've spent significant time and investments in my life into music, into the arts, and also organizing events and conferences. My forage into music started when I was about six years old and I wanted to play drums, and my parents told me that if I built my own shed to store my drums in and practise in, I could begin to play drums. As a six-year-old I counted the cost and realized that as a six-year-old this wasn't quite up to my skill set, so I ended up not playing drums.

Carrying on, during about the same period my sister started playing violin. She did not have to build a shed, but she developed a love for it. Let me tell you something, Madam Speaker. As somebody who begins playing violin at a very young age, there is a deep skill set to be desired and a deep skill set deficit that can only be built upon, and over the next few years she developed a few more skills and eventually became good enough that I actually wanted to step back into music.

A few years later – she had been playing for about four years at this point – I realized that I really loved guitar. I love Jimi Hendrix. I love Stevie Ray Vaughan and Steve Vai. I asked my parents if I could play some electric guitar and carry on that way, and they said: absolutely, you can play guitar, but we're going to insist that you learn the very foundations of music. So they put me in classical guitar, which is the exact opposite of Jimi Hendrix and Steve Vai, but it's the very baseline of most classical guitar techniques as we know it in blues and classical. And as absolutely everyone loves a good classical guitar session, people were batting down my door insisting that I perform.

Between myself and my sister we spent a lot of time performing. She, obviously, has incredible talent and then eventually went to university, the Cleveland Institute of Music. She got a partial ride there and then also did her master's at University of Toronto, both very, very good schools, in viola studies, top-tier schools. Very proud of what she's done and been able to keep that up. Now she's playing for the orchestra in Thunder Bay and lives there. So she's gone quite a bit in that direction.

And then for myself that was actually a direction, Madam Speaker, that I was intending to go for university, playing classical guitar and teaching afterwards, but one of the challenges of it is that you need grade 8 piano. Over summer I realized that in order to get into university that fall, you needed to learn some grade 8 piano, so I got a piano teacher. I learned grade 8 piano over a summer. She taught me a couple of techniques, and we carried on for a little while in that direction.

But then I switched directions, ended up not going to music school but am deeply caring about music. Then carrying on a little bit later in life, after spending some time in that world, too, I ended up building a couple youth conferences and doing a bunch of youth events, too, so taking some smaller youth events and turning them into several hundred people using arts, comedy, speakers, bringing people together in community throughout northern Alberta.

So I feel, Madam Speaker, that I have a little bit of experience in music and the arts and then also, growing up, was involved in drama as well, both in plays which my mom and the church I was going to put on. My mom taught speech arts, so we always had people going to the Rotary Music Festival, which I also performed in in classical guitar and my sister played in. Also, my sister competed in Rotary music arts, in speech arts and often went to provincials in that and has had great success in that area, too, so deep family history in the arts through all this time.

3:50

But one of the key things that I just wanted to talk about here today, too, is just that one of the key points of music that my guitar teacher kept driving into our heads is that the job of a performer is to make the music make sense. It's to bring together the sounds that need to be getting together and also remove and divide what needs to be apart, to use and break the silence with purpose, and for those who listen to be able to interpret what we intended for them to interpret. In this context I believe that also still makes sense here today, and we need to bring together what makes sense and divide what doesn't make sense. To be frank, Madam Speaker, I believe that this government is already doing that. It's already bringing together the things that make sense. We already have the Foundation for the Arts standing up for excellence in the arts across Alberta. From supporting events and the arts from northern, northwestern, northeastern, southern Alberta, and right across, we see significant opportunity.

I just want to speak a little bit more about some of my experience in the Rotary Music Festival as well. We still support them through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, but these are community endeavours. These are the communities choosing that this is a way that they want to move the arts forward. They approach the Alberta Foundation for the Arts and are able to work with them to see if it's their appropriate venue for funding. We already have this in process. This government already deeply cares about the arts. We're already doing this. We already have money.

We are also having significant investment into the arts, and we are continuing to build Alberta, and we're continuing to build up the arts community through this. We've also created incredible art programs, art spaces, investment in music, investment in books, investment in festivals. All of these come under the arts, and we've done a great job in supporting this, too, and over the next few years we will see record numbers of investment as well. This is what the Conservative government has done, Madam Speaker, to be able to invest in arts and be proud of that right across this.

Madam Speaker, I think there are a few things that Albertans deeply care about, too. As musicians or artists they want to be able to prove their skills. They want to be able to be in a marketplace where they can develop, where they can work towards something, be able to develop that and build upon that. We have a marketplace that does this, that's already supporting those skill sets. I also believe that Albertans are hard-working people and that they will be able to pursue those things currently and develop those things currently as well. They're able to showcase their talents, able to showcase and prove their spot amongst the great artists of Alberta.

As well, one of the key things on our side is the freedom to create, the freedom to be part of the arts community. That's what this side is about, to be able to create a space where people are able to freely join and develop that and work on their next project without interference of red tape. To me, as someone who has worked as well as participated in the arts for many years, I don't think we need another layer of red tape. We don't need to add another government body. We already have one that's doing great work. We don't need to divide resources. We don't need to make a challenge for artists to understand where they need to turn to if they're looking for some support.

I just want to say this, too, Madam Speaker. The Alberta Foundation for the Arts is doing great work. We already give them record amounts, or in the future we'll be giving them record amounts. We're planning for this to continue to build the arts here in Alberta, and we already give the board of directors – we already put them on. There are so many redundancies of this Bill 211 that we're already doing with the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. I don't believe we need this duplication.

To wrap up, Madam Speaker, I just urge every member of this Assembly to vote against this bill. It is a duplication, and I don't believe we need to move this bill further.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Member Tejada: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak in favour of Bill 211, brought forward by my wonderful colleague the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, who has long been known for his support of the arts and artists. I can attest to that, having been on tours with him and just having seen the wonderful reception he gets from everyone in the arts community. They know that he's truly supportive of them and behind them.

One of the greatest concerns we hear from Alberta artists and organizations is that there are too many barriers to being able to leverage and access the funding that would give them the necessary boost to be successful. This government could be a key partner in doing this work, supporting Alberta's arts and culture sector.

I hope that, you know, despite some of the boastfulness that I hear – I'm sure there are many things that are successes, and they can speak to some of the successes in arts and culture here in Alberta. I would suggest to them to have a bit of a pause and to think about what this bill is rather than answer by boasting, and think of what is yet to be informed. I would hope that they'd be informed by the work of my colleague in building a provincially co-ordinated strategy that can tie together the systems while receiving direction from people who are actually in the arts and culture sector.

Now, one of the things that is being brought forward in Bill 211 is creating the arts and creative economy advisory council. This council would be made up of at least seven members from separate industries with gender, cultural, and geographic representation in the council. I think this is very important although I know I've heard lots of resistance from folks on the other side when it comes to representation and relevant representation that reflects the population of Alberta. The council would also include folks from cultural heritage, live performances, visual and applied arts, written and published works, audiovisual and interactive media, and sound recording, architecture and design.

They would make recommendations to the minister on areas that support sustainability and growth of the arts and creative economy in Alberta. This includes funding programs that Alberta artists are eligible for. It addresses barriers to accessing funding and being informed about what those barriers actually are. We hear about those quite often, and I think even outside of arts and culture we hear about the dearth of information on how to navigate the systems and how to access the help that they so desperately need. In terms of costs associated with applying for funding it would also address that. Talent retention and development, marketing that would support this economy, and ways to grow the sector: this council would submit an annual report to the minister with a summary of the progress made and would be able to request information from the minister and hear from individuals on the ground to get those perspectives that are so desperately needed.

I know that I heard a lot on the other side about, you know, the funding of big projects, and I think a lot of those are critical, as mentioned by my colleague from Edmonton-West Henday. They are critical. They do create jobs, but I think we need to go a bit deeper. We need to address more localized efforts where the needs haven't been met. Regardless of which side we sit on, I don't think I'm going too far in saying that the importance of arts in our communities can't be understated. We live in a very unique and diverse place here in Alberta, and we know that arts and creative industries have long told the stories of all who live here.

Now, a key word in this bill is “economy,” and that’s because the arts and creative industries have long had great potential to create jobs and pay bills for the bold souls that are committed to doing the work that they love. We know that it can be a challenge and more so now than ever given that we are facing an affordability crisis and in terms of some of our creative industries which rely on working with the States or having contracts with companies in the United States. Trump is proposing 100 per cent tariffs on film and TV, and I think that that’s something that should also be considered. An advisory council would give them the necessary intel to be of assistance to the minister in that case.

When we talk about affordability crisis and arts paying the bills, there was a time in my life where the arts literally paid my bills. Though I often received the message that it could not and would not as a racialized young person who was living in poverty, I was able to persevere. I got a design degree and dedicated myself to my craft. I was able to contribute to my own mortgage while raising two young children who, unsurprisingly, have their own artistic leanings and who, I hope, can flourish in this province alongside other creative young people.

4:00

Now, I can say that my kids are in a much better position than I was at the time. But what I’m hoping is that as we navigate this affordability crisis, if we have a government that says that they truly support the arts, they can also assist in making the arts more accessible to folks from all walks of life. There is untold potential in this province, and I’ve seen it.

I think it’s so important to have a strategy that serves local community initiatives. Again, I repeat that while we look at the bigger projects that have been funded, unfortunately I see in my own constituency that some of the smaller organizations are falling by the wayside. These are organizations that have served – I know that in the community of Calgary-Klein Evergreen Theatre, who I’m sure the minister is well familiar with, is now looking at closing their doors on June 30 due to lack of funding and lack of support from this government.

It’s especially sad because when we were talking about access to the arts for all walks of life, Evergreen Theatre Society is an organization that was committed wholeheartedly to that effort. They have a wonderful space that they’ve offered to community. They’ve tried to do more affordable rates for community organizations that otherwise wouldn’t be able to have a space in which to practice, and they also have rented out that space for community events. So it’s with great sadness that I see that they’ve said that they’re about to close their doors. I would invite the minister. If at any point she would like to talk with me and with this organization about how we can lend a helping hand to this organization that is currently struggling in our city and that has served so many, I’m very open to that.

In terms of this bill, I think this bill would go a very, very long way to prevent situations such as that and to address the needs in our community to help arts and culture flourish.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Ms Chapman: Thank you so much, Madam Speaker. I think I won’t waste five minutes talking about, you know, my journey through music lessons as a child. Why don’t we just go ahead and get right to the substance of the bill here, Bill 211. I’d really like to thank my colleague the Member for Calgary-Buffalo for bringing this. I think this is the first time I have heard us speak about the arts in this Chamber in any meaningful way, so I just really appreciate

the opportunity that this is giving us to have a conversation about what’s going on with the arts in Calgary.

Now, I’ve heard a bit of commentary from the other side about AFA. AFA is a great organization, of course, providing grants to both organizations and individuals, but once again, when we actually break down AFA funding and look at what individual organizations are getting – because the government loves to present funding in the big number, in the total number, right? Just like funding for education, once you take that number and you divide it out across the number of students that we have in the province, well, we know in education what that leads to is the lowest funding per student in the country.

Our arts funding is the same. Whatever that number is – and I don’t have it off the top of my head. Tens of millions of dollars – yeah; sure – but we are dividing that pot across dozens of organizations and individuals. I would like to point out – and my colleagues had mentioned this – that AFA funding over three years of UCP budget cycles has actually been cut by 14 per cent. This is in direct contrast, of course, to what the NDP did when we were in government because we are a party that supports the arts in Calgary. Under us AFA actually saw an increase, an 18 per cent increase in funding.

Now, I was listening to the minister speak about Bill 211. I mean, I guess it’s her first day because the complaint was that Bill 211 doesn’t bring any additional funding in for the arts. Yeah, that’s how private member’s bills work, right? We’re not allowed to. Believe me, if we could bring a bill before this House that was going to direct more funds into arts and culture in Alberta, we would absolutely do that, but, of course, as the minister well knows, actually we cannot do that. What we can do is what we’ve done here, which is bring a bill asking for some resources, some study, and some actual strategy for what’s happening with arts and culture in Alberta.

Once again, I’ve said that the AFA is a wonderful organization, but there are dozens of arts organizations in Alberta who are not able to access funding from the AFA, and the reason for that is that there’s not enough money there, right? You can only spread that pot so thin. I really encourage members to go and take a look at the size of grants that the AFA is handing out. For example, I looked up Pumphouse Theatre. Pumphouse Theatre was one of my first employers after I graduated university. Just in case you’re wondering what salaries in the arts are like, I made \$28,000 a year. [interjection] Yeah. It was a little hard, right? It was a thing.

Pumphouse Theatre, if you’re not familiar with the venue, is a venue in Calgary. It’s got two theatres. It is an incubator space, so it is a space that is still somewhat affordable for small theatre companies to rent. It was always a mix of small professional companies and then also community theatre. Pumphouse Theatre gets \$37,633 from the AFA. Does that sound like anywhere close to the amount of money it would take to actually run a venue? No, obviously not.

I want to flag Beddington Theatre Arts Centre. This is a space in my community that’s done something really wonderful. Like many communities across Calgary that have physical community centres, the community association had to give up the centre. There simply were not the resources provided, and of course we know this government is reducing funding to municipalities all the time, so many of these community associations are no longer able to have their community centres be viable. Now, we were really lucky in Calgary-Beddington; when the community association was no longer able to make a go of the centre, we had an organization step in and turn it into something really wonderful, a gathering space and, again, an incubator space for theatre and the arts in Calgary. We are so lucky to have Storybook Theatre in there because Storybook Theatre is a company that is focused on bridging young people from the amateur world to the professional world.

I definitely would encourage the minister to have a look at Storybook Theatre and have a look at Beddington Theatre Arts Centre and the work they're doing in the community. It's really wonderful that we can support these huge venues – right? – like Arts Commons. They're splashy. You know, they have lovely reception rooms, great for a glass of wine and enjoying, like, a really high-end show. But if we don't have the foundation, how are we actually supporting the next generation of performing theatre artists, film artists? We hear the minister talk about film a lot, and what we need is to have a space where those people can learn and grow and develop, and we are seriously missing funding for those kind of spaces in Alberta.

As I mentioned, Pumphouse Theatre: \$37,000 a year. What's happening is that increasingly these small companies, small professional companies, community theatre companies, can't afford to operate. They can't afford the rental on the venue because the venues aren't getting enough government money to come anywhere close to keeping the doors open, right? A fraction of their budget is what they get in government support.

4:10

Oh, sorry, guys; I love the arts. I have a lot of things to say, okay? I'm going to try to wrap it up, but I just have to comment because I did hear a member opposite talking about conservative government investing in the arts, and I was struggling with that. Like, the mother ship in Ottawa just ran on a campaign to defund the CBC, which is the incubator space for Canadian arts. So don't try talking to me about how conservative governments support the arts, because, well, nothing could be further from the truth, Madam Speaker.

I heard some comments, too, about this bill and how councils and committees are red tape. That was rich, because I was in this House when that member introduced a bill for a committee. How are we deciding which ones are red tape, which ones aren't red tape? What I see here is a pattern from conservative governments. They do not support the arts, and they're not convincing me with their actions that they do.

Thank you so much. I know I have many of my colleagues over here who want to speak to this bill, because of course in the NDP we actually do support the arts, so I will take my seat.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North East.

Member Brar: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today as someone whose heart still beats on the stage and in the wings and behind the curtains of community theatres. For eight years I was a theatre activist. I know what it means to rehearse late into the night in a borrowed basement, to perform on constrained budgets, and to tell the stories of our people, stories often ignored in the mainstream narrative.

Today, on Red Dress Day, as we honour the lives of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, I begin with a solemn truth. Art is remembrance, art is resistance, and art is healing. Red dresses swaying in the wind are more than a symbol; they are a haunting visual cry for justice. It reminds us that art is not just a mirror of the society; it is the tool with which we can shape the society.

When governments fail to act, art becomes protest. When voices are silenced, art becomes the megaphone. And when pain becomes unbearable, art becomes survival. Madam Speaker, artists are not just entertainers. They are activists, and activists are artists in their own right, painting a better future, scripting justice, and choreographing social change. That's why this bill, Bill 211, is not just timely; it is essential.

This bill, introduced by my colleague the MLA for Calgary-Buffalo finally proposes a co-ordinated, inclusive, community-rooted strategy for Alberta's creative economy. It does what the UCP has failed to do for years: give artists a seat at the table, not

just a line in the budget. Let's be honest. Under the UCP the arts have been treated like a luxury instead of a livelihood. In their first three budgets the UCP slashed Alberta Foundation for the Arts funding by over 14 per cent. While Budget 2025 claimed a funding increase, much of it was simply redirected to cover the Glenbow Museum, masking the reality that front-line artists, small venues, and grassroots groups continue to be starved of support.

Meanwhile, the Oilers Entertainment Group walked away with a \$106 million funding agreement. Let that sink in, Madam Speaker. The province could find millions for a major sports entertainment corporation, but artists in Edmonton and Calgary were left scrambling, desperately trying to keep the lights on. In my community theatre groups couldn't even buy or maintain a local venue to showcase culturally diverse stories. Many were ready to build and to collaborate, to thrive, but the system just wasn't built for them.

Art should not be for the few; it should be by and for the many. I speak for the local Punjabi singers in the northeast who perform at city parks because they can't afford an expensive venue. I speak for the theatre performers in my riding who use their art to speak truth to power. They still have no resources to build a new community theatre. Art isn't just culture; it's employment, it's advocacy, and it's identity. But our current systems create more red tape than red carpets. Grant timelines are unclear, funding rules are rigged, and too often the people making decisions have never lived the struggles of working artists. That's why Bill 211 is so important, Madam Speaker. It doesn't just acknowledge the creative sector; it brings it to the heart of policy-making.

This bill establishes a diverse representative advisory council that includes people from live performance, architecture, cultural heritage, visual arts, publishing, sound recording, and digital media. It commits to diversity not just as a buzzword but as a framework. Gender, culture, and geography: all will be represented under this bill. Finally, local artists will be asked what they need instead of being told what's good for them. The council's plan will be more than a report. It will be a road map to build Alberta's arts sector from the grassroots up. It will tackle barriers to funding, streamline application processes, and ensure that even the smallest venues and artists are seen, heard, and supported.

We cannot speak of Alberta's creative economy without recognizing the deep, rich contributions of Indigenous arts and cultures. Indigenous communities have kept traditions alive through beadwork, song, dance, storytelling, and visual arts, often in the face of erasure and exploitation. Supporting Indigenous art is not charity, Madam Speaker; it's reconciliation in action. Yet Indigenous artists continue to face higher barriers to access funding, to secure performance spaces, and to gain recognition of their intellectual property. This bill offers an opportunity to uplift those voices, to protect those traditions, and to embed Indigenous perspectives into the cultural policy of this province.

Madam Speaker, Calgary-North East is full of cultural powerhouses. From bhangra dancers to live performing singers, from theatre activists to writers, this community thrives with creative energy, but creative energy without support is burnout waiting to happen. Inflation is crushing artists. Many are being forced to abandon their craft to make ends meet. But imagine – just imagine – what they could do if they had the resources to thrive. Imagine a community where art is no longer a side hustle but a sustainable career. Imagine an Alberta where young kids in Cornerstone grow up seeing their stories reflected on stage, in murals, and in mainstream galleries not just as exceptions but as the norm. That's the Alberta this bill dares to dream of, and I stand in full support of this bill.

4:20

Madam Speaker, the UCP has spent years sidelining our artists, cutting their funding, ignoring their input, and prioritizing corporate

megadeals over community-driven expression. But with this bill we have a chance to flip the script. Art is not just paint on canvas or lyrics in a song. It's a political act. It's a cultural anchor. It's a democratic right. If this government truly believes in building a prosperous Alberta, it must understand that prosperity isn't just pipelines and profits; it's poetry, performance, and people.

Let's pass this bill not just for the artists we already know but for the ones still waiting to be seen. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today in full support of Bill 211, and I appreciate the opportunity to speak in support of this bill, the Arts and Creative Economy Advisory Council Act. I have to say that it's a timely and much-needed initiative. I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Buffalo for putting this forward.

Madam Speaker, Alberta's creative industries are an important and an essential part of our economy. I think we would all agree that the cultural arts, the creative industries matter to not only Alberta as a province but certainly our cultural identity. But if you talk to artists, Alberta's artists and cultural workers would tell you that they've been forced to navigate fragmented systems, opaque funding rules, and unpredictable political priorities.

Bill 211 offers a pathway forward, a way to elevate the voices of Alberta's creators, improve co-ordination, and ensure that government priorities actually reflect the needs of the people who make our province vibrant. For all the rhetoric about economic diversification, the creative economy has never received the consistent and strategic support it deserves from this government. If we are serious about building a future-ready Alberta, we must take the arts and creative industries seriously. We must recognize that they are important economic drivers, job creators, and culture builders.

I want to talk about this bill from the perspective of the economy. We don't often talk about the arts as job creators, but the reality is that they create real jobs for Albertans. Artists are entrepreneurs. Many of them are gig workers, and many more are small-business owners. They are musicians, writers, designers, filmmakers, cultural programmers, architects, digital storytellers.

The creative economy in Alberta is a significant contributor to GDP, and across Canada it generates nearly \$55 billion annually, employing over 700,000 people. Let's take that in stock. Yet artists in Alberta continue to face systemic underinvestment and policy neglect. The supports that do exist are inconsistent and inaccessible. I've heard from some artists who tell me that sometimes the rules don't make a lot of sense, funding doesn't always arrive on time, and the current government has shown a troubling pattern of prioritizing flashy megaprojects over the lifeblood of creative communities: the local venues, grassroots festivals, and independent artists.

That's why we need Bill 211. This legislation creates an arts and creative economy advisory council that brings together voices from across the cultural sector from visual and applied arts to sound recording, architecture, and design; a council with geographic, cultural, and gender representation; a council mandated to advise the minister, identify barriers, propose solutions, and champion the creative economy. It's truly a long, long overdue step, Madam Speaker. The many artists that I speak to talk about the lack of cohesion and the challenges of making a living in the Alberta art scene. It's really a testament, the fact that we have such a vibrant cultural art scene in Alberta, to the resilience and the grit of the artists. They're succeeding in spite of this government, not because of it.

I also want to talk about what happened after the COVID-19 pandemic. I think we can all recognize that it devastated many sectors in Alberta's economy, but in particular it wreaked havoc on the creative sector. Festivals were shuttered, venues were closed,

many artists lost their livelihoods, and recovery has been slow, especially for small and medium-sized arts organizations. In Edmonton the number of cafes and restaurants that featured live music has dropped from 78 before the pandemic to just 50 today. Nightclubs with live music went from nine to six. The Edmonton International Fringe Theatre Festival, the largest of its kind in North America, lost \$3 million in revenue during the pandemic and warned last year that without provincial support it may need to cut programming or scale back.

Yet we've seen from this government that they have been slow to act. Instead of targeted investments in community venues and emerging artists, we've seen splashy announcements prioritizing big-ticket partnerships like the \$106 billion deal with the Oilers Entertainment Group, a deal that was made without confirmed consultation with local venues like the Starlite Room and one that left many in the arts community feeling excluded and overlooked.

The same pattern has played out in Calgary. While the Arts Commons received significant investment, small and mid-sized organizations continue to struggle with rising costs and limited access to stable funding. Calgary's Bluesfest, for example, is now grappling with massive increases in operational costs due to changes made to Cowboys park, changes that weren't accompanied by increased provincial support. Madam Speaker, I think what this tells us is that Alberta's current arts support system is fragmented. It tells us that decisions are often made without consulting the people most affected, and it tells us that without real accountability these gaps will continue to widen. That's why this bill is so important.

I'll give you the Alberta Foundation for the Arts as an example, which is our province's central funding body for arts and culture. In the 2023-2024 fiscal year the AFA provided 398 operational grants and 277 project grants, which sounds pretty good, doesn't it? But the story behind these numbers is a bit more complicated. In the first three UCP budgets starting in 2019, AFA funding was actually cut by over 14 per cent, and while Budget 2025 includes a \$4.5 million increase, most of that money is simply being used to absorb the Glenbow Museum, which had previously received its own dedicated line item.

In other words, the increase isn't actually an investment or reinvestment in artists or in programming; it's a reshuffling of accounting lines to make it look like growth. We often see that tactic from this government. Meanwhile, artists continue to face unclear eligibility rules, slow turnaround times, and bureaucratic hurdles that make it harder, not easier, to create. I should mention that under the former NDP government the AFA received a meaningful 18 per cent increase in funding, which allowed for expansion and access, sustainability and outreach. That's the kind of strategic investment we need to return to, and that's the kind of vision Bill 211 can help make possible.

4:30

We've heard from musicians who received one grant to record a single and a second to record an album only to find that, due to the way that the rules were structured, they couldn't legally include the single on the album. This is a real case. That's the kind of arbitrary technicality that stifles progress, and it happens far too often because the people writing the rules aren't always in conversation with the people affected by them. Madam Speaker, Bill 211 fixes that by ensuring artists, creators, cultural workers have a permanent seat at the table, and this council would be empowered to gather information, consult widely.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others who wish to join in this debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to strongly support Bill 211, the Arts and Creative Economy Advisory Council Act. Alberta's creative sector is not only a cornerstone of our cultural identity; it plays a critical role in our economy and our collective well-being. I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Buffalo for bringing this bill. This bill is a necessary step towards recognizing the struggles and the aspirations of Alberta's artist creators. It is an overdue commitment to building a system that works with them, a system that works for them, and a system that enables them to succeed.

Madam Speaker, the sector needs coherence. The sector needs a co-ordination system, and the sector needs to be improved in a way where artists can easily navigate through. We've heard it time and again from the people who work in the sector. We've heard it time and again from the artists that the existing systems and the existing pathways are very hard to navigate. It lacks transparency. It needs improvement. The support systems are fragmented. The funding processes are unclear, and the opportunities are shrinking instead of growing at this time when the need is really high. Artists are spending more time navigating bureaucracy than creating art. Organizations are seeing operational costs go up while grants and opportunities shrink. Emerging creators are giving up not because of lack of passion but because this structure is so complex.

Let me give you an example. Just last week alongside the Member for Edmonton-City Centre I joined members of the Black community as they launched their second year Jabulani festival. It's a four-day festival that is a remarkable celebration of African, Caribbean, and Black artists. The word "jabulani" is a Zulu word that means rejoice and that a spirit is filled. That rejoice of a spirit is filled in the Roxy Theatre with poetry, with dance and song. But behind this celebration there was a real frustration. Organizers told me that access to funding was complicated, that support they needed was just not there. Madam Speaker, it's not bureaucracy. Creating the advisory that is required, the council that is needed: it's not bureaucracy. It is actually a bridge that will help.

This is not a partisan issue, Madam Speaker; it is a people issue. Every single MLA in this Chamber has a local artist, has a musician, has a filmmaker, a creator in the ridings that we all represent. They teach in our schools. They host workshops in our community centres. They put on plays in rural theatres and perform in city squares. Bill 211 is not about more spending; it's about smarter spending. I urge all members to support Bill 211. Support Bill 211 because your constituency are asking for it. Support Bill 211 because a strong creative economy is smarter investment. I ask all members to support because the artists of Albertans deserve to be seen, heard, and valued.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to make a couple of points around Bill 211. You know, I was interested to hear the minister of culture say in her rejection of Bill 211, quote: I don't need a council to fulfill my mandate. Well, goodness gracious me, yes, she does. Absolutely, she does, because the council that is outlined in Bill 211 encompasses all of the different things that she is responsible for in her ministry. To suggest that she doesn't need advice from cultural heritage, live performance, visual and applied arts, written and published works, audiovisual and interactive media, sound recording, architecture and design is a flippant comment at best to make and deeply confused at worst, a serious misunderstanding of what her responsibility is as minister.

This is not a money bill. This is a way to help mobilize thousands of artists in all of these different disciplines, who are more than happy to give their time and effort and patience to build the cultural

community here in the province of Alberta. They're not just here to look for some funding support; they're here to build cultural support. So the idea that you don't need a council to fulfill the mandate, (a) maybe there's something wrong with that mandate, and (b), maybe this is time for something like Bill 211 and this council to actually reach fruition.

We have a lot of serious issues in the cultural community. In the last 48 hours I'm sure many of you have noticed that the latest American attack on Canada and the world is the threat of a 100 per cent tariff on film not coming from the United States of America, a 100 per cent tariff, right? This is hardly a "big win," as our Premier famously said a few days ago. This kind of craziness just keeps on rolling over us, the latest one being our burgeoning film and television industry, something that we talk about a lot, that we hold in a high place – I heard the minister talking about it specifically – that's under existential threat through tariffs. What better time is it for us to go back and talk to all of the best and the brightest that we have in the film and television industry across this province and say: what are we going to do? We're not going to bend over and fold the tents and then finish up with this threat. We can mobilize and regroup and come up with a strategy through a council that's outlined here in Bill 211.

There are many other areas here. Another one I find very interesting is architecture and design. We're in the midst of one of the largest population growth and building cycles here in the province of Alberta. What better time to have a coherent design and architecture strategy for the province of Alberta? So we're not just putting up boxes that will last 20, 30 years and you have to take them down again. We can build something that is lasting, that we can be proud of, that's beautiful, and that can help to inspire and not just house Albertans, because that's what culture is all about. It's not just to as an industry – but it's a way to improve the quality of our lives. Bill 211 is an excellent way to approach that. It's not a money bill. It's a bill to help build culture here in the province of Alberta.

Thanks.

4:40

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to join in the debate, Bill 211?

Seeing none, I will ask the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to close debate.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Just to conclude and wrap this up, Bill 211 is all about getting advice and direction to the minister and her department so that artists and creative leaders who – who better to know how to go forward with investments, with saving money, with addressing the challenges and impacts, as my colleagues have all been talking about? Who better to support the minister and her department around Alberta's creative economy than the people who are currently in that situation? Leaders in cultural institutions as well as artists have great intel, information, and advice to give. An advisory council would help the minister prepare and defend for increased investments, defend the need for increased investments to arts and culture, and advise on how best to handle the evolving political landscapes regarding actions that could have devastating impacts on Alberta's creative industries.

Today, for example, the minister would have been better prepared for the questions about the 100 per cent tariffs potentially that are coming from the United States as a result of President Trump musing when he wants to repatriate all filmmaking to America. The minister uttered some holding lines in response to those questions like: we'll have to wait and see, diplomacy is a way to address these challenges. And in reference to a reporter asking, "Well, you know, the Ontario

minister is talking about a minister of culture as saying that they'll go toe to toe with tariffs imposed there on Canada and Ontario," our minister refrained from any elbows-up comment, leaving the film and TV industry to wonder if they'll get any support at all from this minister and this government with regard to the film and TV industry here.

As we heard earlier, the minister regularly touts the importance of the film and TV industry and talks about how much it's grown. But when asked, "Are you going to defend it?" the answer is: diplomacy; Mar-a-Lago; we'll look to the results of those kind of interactions. Well, I can tell you, you know, that the people in the industry are looking for a little more substance, a little more perhaps backbone to defend their industry, where they've spent their lives in themselves and they've been able to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in over time and the same with Alberta.

An advisory council would also be able to give advice on things like how AI is impacting, will impact the future of the book publishing industry and, to a lesser extent, magazine publishing industry. Also, a further example of the importance of an advisory council like this is that we hear regularly from the minister of sports that, you know, \$24 million is spent on every kid can play so they can play sports and recreation. But unlike Saskatchewan, that has a program that supports children who want to play and get support in the arts or in theatre or in dance, we have nothing here in terms of that and a minister who won't stand up for those children like – Ontario has had a program in place for 20 years.

I really want to also say that the minister talked a lot about red tape and how this doesn't bring any more money to the table. Of course, the ways private members' bills operate, you can't talk about cutting budgets; you can't talk about investing in budgets. You can only really talk about things that work around the edges, and that's what this bill does. You know, if the minister was concerned about wasting money, as she proposes, maybe Turkish Tylenol would be something she'd stand up and talk against, maybe the \$2 million on the underestimating COVID report could be something she talks about, maybe the \$300,000 carpets in the Premier's office is something she would object to as well as the \$10,000 for a selfie in Mar-a-Lago.

I hope people support Bill 211 because it's a way to help the industry and help artists in our province. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to address this today. I hope all members will also similarly support.

Thank you.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:46 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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|---------|----------|-----------|
| Brar | Elmeligi | Miyashiro |
| Ceci | Haji | Renaud |
| Chapman | Hoffman | Sabir |
| Dach | Ip | Schmidt |
| Eggen | Kasawski | Tejada |

Against the motion:

| | | |
|--------------------|----------|-----------------|
| Amery | Johnson | Rowswell |
| Armstrong-Homeniuk | Jones | Sawhney |
| Boitchenko | LaGrange | Schow |
| Bouchard | Loewen | Schulz |
| Cyr | Long | Sigurdson, R.J. |
| de Jonge | Lovely | Singh |

| | | |
|----------|------------|--------------|
| Dreeshen | Lunty | Stephan |
| Dyck | McDougall | Turton |
| Ellis | McIver | Wiebe |
| Fir | Nally | Williams |
| Getson | Neudorf | Wilson |
| Glubish | Nicolaides | Wright, J. |
| Horner | Nixon | Yao |
| Hunter | Petrovic | Yaseen |
| Jean | Pitt | |
| Totals: | For – 15 | Against – 44 |

[Motion for second reading of Bill 211 lost]

Motions Other than Government Motions

Well Cleanup and Remediation

523. Mr. Schmidt moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to

- affirm the fundamental importance of the "polluter pays" principle that the costs of well cleanup and remediation should be borne by the entities responsible for their operation,
- ensure that no public funds are allocated to entities for the purpose of cleaning up or remediating liabilities, and
- strengthen existing regulations and enforcement mechanisms to protect current and future taxpayers by holding responsible parties that are accountable.

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, I urge this Assembly to adopt this motion because, as I'll lay out in my speech, the financial burden that environmental liabilities will impose upon the people of Alberta, if this House does not affirm and enforce the fundamental importance of the polluter-pay principle, is one that Albertans should not and cannot bear. In fact, I would suggest that the financial risk posed by environmental liabilities is the gravest financial risk that the province of Alberta faces today, and by not dealing with the risk, the government will financially cripple the province for many years to come.

I think it's important to start off by explaining what I mean when I talk about the financial burden of environmental liabilities. Alberta's reclamation regulations require that all specified land – that is, land used for, among other things, oil wells, pipelines, gas plants, refineries, mines, roadways, railways – must be reclaimed to equivalent land capability; that is to say, the ability of the land to support various land uses after conservation and reclamation similar to the ability that existed prior to an activity being conducted on that land.

Now, reclaiming a site to equivalent land capability is not a trivial matter. Reclaiming industrial land requires time, expertise, equipment, and material and as a result can be very, very expensive. I have a great deal of personal experience with this work. Prior to being elected in 2015, 10 years ago today – thank you to the people of Edmonton-Gold Bar – I worked for 13 years as a geologist, both in the private sector and as a regulator at Alberta Environment, assessing sites for environmental liability and developing and carrying out remediation programs at them.

Most of the sites that I worked on were upstream oil and gas, conventional oil and gas well sites. The assessment and remediation of those sites could often run into the millions of dollars for just the portion of the work that I oversaw, which didn't include any of the well abandonment or reclamation work. Now, when you multiply a million dollars per site by the number of sites that need to be

reclaimed, you quickly realize that the cost of environmental liabilities is a staggering number, so staggering, in fact, that the government refuses to be honest about how much money is at stake.

Now, publicly the Alberta Energy Regulator says that the outstanding liability is about \$34 billion, which, if true, would work out to about \$7,000 that every man, woman, and child would owe to clean it up, but behind closed doors the AER estimates liabilities to be 10 times as high. In a 2018 private meeting held with industry, the Alberta Energy Regulator presented an estimate of environmental liability of nearly \$300 billion, or about \$70,000 for every man, woman, and child in the province of Alberta. I look forward to the government of Alberta's future ad campaign letting every family know that they're potentially on the hook for hundreds of thousands of dollars of cleanup costs because this government refuses to hold oil companies accountable.

But wait, there's more. A huge chunk of environmental liability is discussed separately as mine closure costs. Official estimates for the total cost of mine closures in Alberta last year was almost \$60 billion. I have a sneaking suspicion, though, like the liabilities for the upstream oil and gas sites, that they are much higher than that. But even if we accept this number at face value, this means that every Albertan is on the hook for almost \$75,000 of environmental liabilities. Given that the average salary of a working Albertan is around \$70,000 a year, this means that right now every working Albertan would have to dedicate at least a year and a half of their after-tax earnings to pay for the environmental liabilities created by the most profitable corporations in the history of humanity. This is manifestly unfair.

Now, I know that numbers like a working Albertan's salary aren't the kind of numbers that this out-of-touch government feels familiar with, so I want to help them by putting these numbers in terms that they will find more familiar. Three hundred and sixty billion dollars is the equivalent of 600 contracts with MHCare, the Sam Mraiche owned company at the heart of the corrupt care scandal. It's 7,000 years of disability benefit clawbacks from the severely handicapped. It's 180,000 new parking lots bought from Sam Mraiche. It's 1.2 million Government Houses' worth of brand new china. It's carpeting for 1.4 million Premiers' offices. It's 72 million bottles of useless Turkish Tylenol or enough skybox tickets to make sure that every cabinet minister can attend every Oilers home game for the next 140,000 years.

During debate I expect that the government is going to stand up and pat itself on the back for the changes that it's made to the liability management program in the last few years. They'll talk about mandatory closure spends and changes that they've made to the operation of the Orphan Well Association. They'll spin tales about how no public dollars have ever gone to clean up these old sites. Now, as my friends Chuck D and Flavor Flav would advise: don't believe the hype.

5:10

In 2022 when the government announced mandatory closure spends for industry by year, the set amount for 2023 was \$700 million, and they estimated escalating forecasts to \$992 million by 2027. But just a year later they dropped the required amounts, leaving the forecast for 2024 spending at \$700 million a year, no explanation given. The regulator claims that the required spends are based on the deemed liability, but again the regulator's liability estimates cannot be trusted. What's worse is that if a company is more likely to go bankrupt, the less the regulator requires them to spend on cleaning up their environmental liabilities. Now, at the rates that the regulator has set, it will take the industry more than 50 years to clean up its liabilities, assuming that no more are created starting today. Also, Mr. Speaker, the AER's own annual reports

indicate that not every licensee complies with these spends, but what action does the regulator take when a licensee fails to meet its obligations? Nobody knows.

The government will tout other changes it's made to assess the fiscal capacity of licensees to take on additional risk. What they won't say is that the program is completely opaque. We have no idea what information is collected. We don't know what the regulator does with the information that it collects or what the consequences are for licensees that are deemed to be too high a risk.

The government may also point to changes to the Orphan Well Association, claiming that it's increasing the amount of the orphan well levy that the industry pays. There are a few problems with this, though. First, no one has ever publicly explained the rationale for the orphan well levy in any given year. There are no timelines or targets for addressing orphan wells. The rate at which the orphan well levy has increased has been far outstripped by the number of sites added to the orphan well list. Government is not keeping up with the problem.

Finally, the amount of money contributed to the orphan well fund by industry has been dwarfed by the hundreds of millions of dollars granted by the government in so-called loans that the industry will likely never pay back.

Finally, the government will point to their so-called mature asset strategy as their next step for addressing this problem. Now, I've read this strategy and it contains a few problems. It erodes the polluter-pay principle, the basic expectation that those who make the mess should clean it up. This report recommends an integrated package that removes economic and environmental risks to the oil and gas industry and puts them on the public instead. It creates new types of companies used to off-load liabilities using questionable funding that may be supported by taxpayer dollars. It provides for government-run insurance funds that may still be backstopped by Alberta taxpayers, putting the financial burden on the public, and it proposes cuts to environmental regulations and cleanup standards that would make it cheaper for industry.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and speak in favour of Motion 523 proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. The motion has already been read into the record, so to quickly summarize, Motion 523 calls on the government to uphold the polluter-pay principle and urges the government to not use public funds for environmental liabilities created by private companies.

This is a motion that I'm happy to rise in support of. Our government has been clear that no taxpayer dollars will go to private companies to clean up their wells. Beyond that, we have also taken a leadership role by consulting with municipalities, landowners, experts, scientists, Indigenous groups, and industry representatives in creating the mature asset report. The report will guide our strategy for dealing with legacy infrastructure so that we can maximize the value of mature oil and gas assets and effectively manage the closure of inactive sites.

The oil and gas sector is an important part of the economy in the Camrose constituency, something that it would share with constituencies that many of you represent. The jobs created and the revenue generated by this industry are the basis of much of the prosperity that we have in this province. This is even more true when you consider that companies in this industry adhere to strict regulatory standards and take their asset retirement obligations very seriously. Even the assets that are orphaned by companies that go defunct are remediated through the work of the Orphan Well Association, which is funded by industry, not the taxpayers. With our government's commitment to the polluter-pay principle and the compliance of the

vast majority of industry in mind, I'd like to propose an amendment to Motion 523, with the permission of the chair.

The Speaker: If you can please provide the copies through to the page, please feel free to proceed. We're just going to pause the clock for you until I get the amendment.

Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 41(5.2) for amendments to motions other than government motions the mover of the motion must be provided with notice of that motion. Now, I understand that did take place, so that means that the amendment is in order.

The hon. Member for Camrose can proceed.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will move that Motion Other than Government Motion 523 be amended as follows: by striking out "(a), (b), and (c)" and substituting "(b), (c), and (d)"; by adding "(a) recognize that the vast majority of oil and gas producers take their asset retirement obligations seriously and properly decommission and reclaim oil and gas sites at the end of a project" immediately before (b); by adding "continue to" immediately before "affirm the fundamental," adding "adhered to by the Government" immediately after "polluter pays principle," striking "cleanup" and substituting "decommissioning," and striking "entities" and substituting "licensees" in clause (b); by adding "continue to" immediately before "ensure" and striking "to entities" and substituting "to licensees" in clause (c); by adding "continue to review and" immediately before "strengthen existing" and striking "holding" and substituting "continue to hold" and striking "that are" immediately before "accountable" in clause (d).

I believe that these proposed amendments will significantly add to the clarity and enhance the purpose of the motion itself. First, by adding the new clause (a), this motion will now recognize the overwhelming majority of oil and gas producers who meet their commitments rather than emphasizing the bad actors in the sector. As a matter of fact, many of these producers go above and beyond by reclaiming sites ahead of schedule, investing in reclamation technology, and contributing to reclamation efforts. An amendment to Motion 523 will also reflect our government's clear commitment that no taxpayer dollars will go to private companies to clean up their wells.

Changes to the language will also recognize the continued work of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals in examining the 21 recommendations contained in the Mature Asset Strategy report. I'd like to add that when the ministry does announce that direction it goes with that report, it will continue in an already historic effort in well cleanup.

As mentioned earlier, the OWA, which is industry funded, has been addressing the issue of orphaned wells with increasing effectiveness in recent years. The number of sites the OWA fully closed jumped to 622 in '23-24, a 44 per cent increase from the 431 it closed the previous year. This success will continue going forward as the industry spending requirement under Alberta's liability management framework was increased to \$750 million in 2024, compared to only \$465 million in 2022. The Alberta Energy Regulator report on the subject leaves no question. Between 2020 and 2024 the number of inactive wells in Alberta decreased to 78,000 from 97,000, nearly a 20 per cent reduction.

Finally, the amendment I have proposed will replace the vague language with terms more commonly used in industry, making the motion clearer and easier to understand.

5:20

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to say that our province has the most ethically and responsibly produced oil and gas in the world. I'm even more proud that when things go wrong for a company,

taxpayers will not pay the bill. I look forward to hearing the thoughts of those in the Chamber on how these amendments make Motion 523 reflect that reality. I plan on voting in favour of the amendment and in favour of Motion 523, and I'd ask that you all do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, should he choose to respond.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to oppose the amendment brought forward by the Member for Camrose for the fact that it actually undoes the intent of the motion that I initially read into the record. The purpose of the original motion is for members of this House to say, once and for all, that they do not support public dollars going into cleaning up environmental liabilities, and if this amendment is adopted, it says the exact opposite. It says that the government is actually doing a good job of protecting the public purse from covering oil and gas liabilities, which, in fact, is not the case. It's a mystery to me that the Member for Camrose would stand up and say that she supports the motion and then bring forward an amendment that turns the motion into something that the original motion is the complete opposite of.

Now, one of the things that the Member for Camrose said in bringing forward this motion was that, you know, she wanted to add this clause on recognizing that the vast majority of oil and gas producers take their asset retirement obligations seriously and properly decommission and reclaim oil and gas sites at the end of a project. Now, Mr. Speaker, in moving that clause, she also said that many oil and gas operators reclaim their sites ahead of schedule. I ask the Member for Camrose: what schedule? There's no timeline required by any oil and gas operator to decommission, abandon, or reclaim a well. They can leave those hanging out there for eternity, so for the member to say that they're reclaiming them ahead of schedule is not true.

Now, I want to talk about one company, in particular, that the government would say is meeting its oil and gas asset retirement obligations, and that's CNRL. They are one of the largest oil and gas companies in the province. I had a look at the information that the Alberta Energy Regulator put out. Currently they have 89,000 well licenses; 61,000 of those have to be reclaimed. In 2023, which is the last year the data is available for, CNRL reclaimed 900 wells. At that rate, Mr. Speaker, it will take 68 years for CNRL to reclaim its upstream oil and gas liabilities. Sixty-eight years. That means a child born today will have grandchildren who graduate from high school before CNRL is finished cleaning up its environmental liabilities in the upstream oil and gas sites. That's unacceptable to the people of Alberta and poses an extreme financial risk.

But wait, Mr. Speaker. There's more. CNRL also has outstanding liabilities that are supposed to be covered by the mine financial security program. Now, according to the latest records they've got \$61 million in security on the Horizon mine site, they have \$111 million in security on the Muskeg River site, and they have \$72 million in security on the Jackpine site for a total of \$244 million. That's on an estimated \$14 billion in liabilities that they hold in mine financial security. There's no reasonable person who would say that taking 68 years to reclaim their conventional upstream oil and gas wells and only having \$244 million on deposit for the reclamation of \$14 billion of liabilities is taking their asset requirement obligations seriously.

Now, the member opposite also talked about the work that the Orphan Well Association did, saying that it's increased the number of sites that it's reclaimed, and that is true. The fact that she missed out, though, is that the inventory of the Orphan Well Association

continues to grow unabated, and the government is doing nothing to protect the Orphan Well Association from assuming more liabilities in the future.

Now, the final thing that I'd like to say in response to this amendment is that the spirit of the amendment is to persuade the taxpayer that there have been no public dollars that have gone to support the oil and gas industry. Nothing could be further from the truth, Mr. Speaker. We know that the government spent a billion dollars over COVID, money that was given from the federal government, on reclaiming oil and gas liabilities. We know that there is currently \$253 million in unpaid property taxes that oil and gas companies pay. Those bills are picked up by the taxpayer.

Moreover, we also found out at Public Accounts a couple of weeks ago that in 2023-24 the taxpayer was on the hook for \$29 million in delinquent surface lease payments. When I asked what happens to that money, the Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs said: well, that becomes a debt owed to the Finance ministry, and they're the ones who are responsible for pursuing those debts. But it turns out that when you ask the Finance minister how many of those debts they pursued, the answer is zero, so we're on the hook for \$30 million a year just for delinquent surface payments. That's not to mention the \$2 billion in carbon capture and storage that the government has committed to, the billions of dollars in royalty credits and gas royalty exemptions that they've provided to the government over the years.

The taxpayer has already well funded oil and gas companies to make sure that they have been successful, Mr. Speaker, and it's time for the people of Alberta to get a fair deal from oil and gas companies in this province. I urge all members of this House to vote against this amendment, vote in favour of the original motion, stand up for Alberta taxpayers, and make sure that the bill for environmental liabilities is given to the ones who have made the messes and is not foisted upon us and future generations of taxpayers.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Banff-Kananaskis.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to the amendment on Motion 523. First of all, I want to recognize the important intent behind the motion as presented by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. We all understand that the intent of it is to try to make sure that we understand that the provincial government will not be paying for the cleaning up of these orphan wells, and we support that. The motion is to affirm the polluter-pay principle and, like I said, to ensure that Alberta's approach to well cleanup, decommission, and remediation remains responsible and accountable. I agree with that, the principle that those who profit from Alberta's resources must also bear the responsibility for cleaning up afterwards. It's only sound public policy. It's common sense, and it's something our government strongly affirms and continues to uphold.

While I appreciate the intent of the original motion as moved by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, we believe it can be improved. The amended motion proposed by the Member for Camrose accurately reflects the current reality in our province and the significant work already under way by this government. The amendment recognizes a truth that is often overlooked in these discussions, that the vast majority of oil and gas producers in Alberta take their responsibilities to clean up very seriously. They follow the rules, they reclaim their sites, and they respect the landowners.

But it's therefore important to acknowledge these responsible operators and their efforts and not make a mistake of painting all

industry operators as bad due to the actions of a few bad actors. It's like blaming a whole community or a whole identity group for the malfeasance or actions of a few. We shouldn't be doing that. It's not accurate.

It's also important to mention that a few bad actors who came to this province and were allowed to flourish did so under the watch of the NDP when they were in government as well. You know, you can't just cast responsibility on this particular government when you were in the government when some of these actors came here, acquired properties, and haven't met their responsibilities. It's a problem we all have to deal with and a responsibility we all have.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let me be clear. Our government remains firmly committed to the polluter-pays principle. I said before that it's the right thing to do. That means we have the responsibility for well cleanup.

Decommissioning and remediation rests with the licensees, not the taxpayer. I don't know how we can be more clear than that. That's why I support the amendment, which explicitly adds that no public funds will be allocated to private entities for the purpose of cleanup.

5:30

The member opposite talked about what happened during COVID. Funds from the federal government that were primarily intended to keep the service sector going at a period of time that the industry was shut down – that's what those funds were intended for – were utilized for the purposes of some of these well cleanups. The purpose of the federal government funds was to keep the industry active during a crisis time here in this country and around the world.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is already making significant progress on the front of well remediation. Over the past five years the Orphan Well Association has decommissioned more wells than it has received. That's a fact. The number of those fully closed rose by 44 per cent in just one year, from 431 to 622. Under the liability management framework we've increased industry mandatory cleanup spending to \$750 million in 2024, up from \$700 million the year before and \$465 million in 2022. Since 2020 the number of inactive wells in Alberta has dropped from 97,000 to 78,000. That's a 20 per cent reduction.

Now, we need to respect our landowners in rural communities. The producers who meet their obligations understand that responsible cleanup isn't just about regulation. It's about earning and maintaining the trust of rural landowners and communities, and to somehow paint the industry in general as doing anything other than that is simply not fair. It's not accurate. It misrepresents the situation. Reclaimed land supports agriculture, recreation, and development. It helps maintain property values and strengthens the long-term sustainability of our rural economy. That's why we're committed to upholding both the industry responsibility and landowner respect.

Mr. Speaker, our government is not just standing still on this issue; we're leading. Through our mature energy asset strategy we have brought together landowners, municipalities, Indigenous leaders, scientists, and industry stakeholders to discuss and address the long-term challenges. We consult with all the players that are involved, not just certain advocacy groups who want to blemish the reputation of the industry and all those within the province who benefit. This forum has come with a report with 21 thoughtful recommendations, which the government is actively reviewing to help chart a responsible path forward. We're going to be deliberate, we're going to be careful, and we're going to be responsible. This is what responsible governance looks like, not reactionary policies but long-term sustainable solutions built on stakeholder consultation.

Why does this amendment matter? First of all, it doesn't water down the original motion's intent; it strengthens it, makes it more

accurate in reality. It incorporates industry-accurate terminology, making the language more aligned with current practices and clearer for all stakeholders. It recognizes the work already being done under our government's watch and lays out a balanced vision, one that supports responsible operators while holding bad actors accountable. Let's not forget that it affirms that this work is already under way, not theoretical, not aspirational but real and measurable.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the opposition has tried to frame this issue as though some government support for cleanup efforts somehow equates to abandoning accountability. What they fail to acknowledge is that many of the problem companies were welcomed, as I mentioned before, during their time in government, companies with questionable balance sheets, no clear ability or willingness to meet their responsibilities. They failed to act, and now they want to shift all the blame. Our government is cleaning up the mess, holding operators accountable, and doing so without burdening taxpayers. That's the bottom line.

Mr. Speaker, let me close by saying that this Motion 523 is important, but the amended version is stronger, more precise, more reflective of the work already being done. It acknowledges the leadership role our government has taken, the investment being made by industry, and that principles will be consistently upheld.

We all agree on the goal: ensuring that Albertans are not left with the cost of cleanup. Let's do so while recognizing those who do the right thing, which is the vast majority of the industry, and focusing on the real solutions. I encourage all members of this Assembly to support Motion 523 as amended.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on amendment A1. The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today in support of my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar and to support some of his concerns about this amendment. I do not support this amendment. It does change the intent of the motion.

I want to take a few minutes to address some of the things that the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek just shared with us. This amendment does change the intent of the motion. When we talk about recognizing that the vast majority of oil and gas producers take their asset retirement obligations seriously and properly decommission and reclaim oil and gas sites at the end of the project, I just want to say if that was true, we wouldn't be here. We wouldn't be having this conversation about abandoned wells if companies took their liabilities seriously. We wouldn't have to have this conversation because those wells would have been reclaimed and taken off the landscape.

But we are here having this conversation, Mr. Speaker, and today I spent some time looking online to see if there was even a number that I could get for an understanding of how many tens of thousands of abandoned wells are out there on the Alberta landscape. And did you know, Mr. Speaker? I couldn't find a consistent number across media reports, from the abandoned wells association, from the Alberta Energy Regulator. To me, that's awful. Sometimes it's 80,000. Sometimes it's 120,000. Sometimes it's 70,000. So I don't really know. We don't even know how many abandoned wells we're talking about here, so don't sit there and try to tell me that companies are doing everything they can because I really don't think that all of them are.

Well cleanup needs to be done by entities that created the mess. This is a principle that I try to instill in my children every single day. If you make a mess, clean it up. Why do we not hold companies to the same standards that we try to hold our kids to? Or at least I try to.

The members opposite want to assert that it's happening and they're doing such a great job of it, the government is firmly committed, the truth is that the good things that companies are doing are overlooked. Well, let's just talk a little bit about the effectiveness of our enforcement and regulatory mechanisms around oil and gas liabilities, Mr. Speaker. Over the last year the Alberta Energy Regulator has sat on its hands while Imperial Kearl oil sands leaked 5.3 million litres of tailings spilled into the area. The Fort Chipewyan Nation ended up suing the AER, and at the end of the day, the AER fined Imperial Oil \$50,000. Wow. My goodness. What a joke. Give me a break.

The AER is clearly failing Albertans repeatedly and in so many ways. Research from Dr. Timoney published in January 2025 shows that the AER is failing to gather credible and relevant environmental data, failing to conduct routine on-site inspections, and being dishonest in its reporting of spill incidents with regard to oil sands tailing spills in Alberta. Of 514 tailings in the AER database that occurred over 10 years from 2014 to 2023, 97 per cent of tailing spills were not inspected by the AER, contradicting the AER's claim of routine spill inspections.

The findings also show that for spill sites where photo documentation is provided, 41 to 54 per cent of the sites show evidence of environmental harm, refuting claims from the AER that none of the 514 spills caused environmental damage. And this is the regulator that we're all supposed to trust is measuring abandoned wells and their reclamation. Well, I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker; I don't trust the AER. I don't trust them as far as I can throw them. And I'm pretty tough, so I think I could throw them pretty far actually.

Speaking about abandoned wells specifically and the polluter-pays principle, polluter pay is executed through regulatory standards, fees and levies, and financial assurance. Who the regulator is – in this case, the AER – is important. I feel like I've already demonstrated that the AER isn't really doing their jobs.

There's also, Mr. Speaker, a significant conflict of interest with the AER given that David Yager is on the AER board. He's also a senior advisor to the Premier, and he's the one who's authored this report of the new oil strategy thing that my colleague was referring to. I feel like when one person is responsible for all of the things, we should be asking ourselves questions around conflict of interest, especially when that one person is responsible for the government's action on a report to take action on the things that their companies and their regulator are doing.

5:40

The Environmental Law Centre did a pretty good review and analysis of the polluter-pays principle in Alberta, Mr. Speaker. As it turns out, the government is doing a moderately okay job, not a good job, and the regulator is doing a poor job. How could we improve that? Well, the first thing is to ensure that environmental obligations are not avoided through insolvency. We've got bankrupt oil and gas companies leaving billions of dollars of liabilities on the landscape, tens of thousands of inactive wells – we don't know the exact number, as I've already said – and the Orphan Well Association doesn't have the funds to clean them all. The companies, as my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar pointed out, have a plan to reclaim their liabilities that will take almost generations of Albertans to have any significant impact on the landscape.

We must do better. There is nothing wrong with holding companies accountable for cleaning up their mess, just like there's nothing wrong with me reminding my daughter 18 times to clean her bedroom.

The second thing is that we need to ensure Alberta's polluter-pay system starts to reflect the costs imposed on terrestrial and aquatic

ecosystems. We also don't even fully take accurate environmental and social cost accounting of these liabilities on the landscape. The current system doesn't include all of the environmental and social costs, so we don't even really have a way to understand what the costs are; in particular, when it comes to being related to water, where we know we have pollution and sedimentation issues and also water usage, Mr. Speaker. We are in a multiyear drought. Oil and gas development and all resource extraction actually requires quite a bit of water. We've got efforts to change water licensing practices, and the Water Act is currently open for public consultation. How is the polluter-pay system being considered in amendments to the Water Act at the moment?

We know that oil and gas liabilities impact aquatic habitat disturbance and loss, and we know that in Alberta we lose more wetlands every single year, Mr. Speaker. Even though we have a wetlands replacement program and wetlands remediation program, we still lose more wetlands than we gain. We need to ensure a workable system of polluter-pays principle that can apply to cumulative effects. Cumulative effects are critical; we do very little to address it.

In essence, Mr. Speaker, this amendment changes the motion. I will not support the amendment. I urge all members to support the original motion as written.

The Speaker: On amendment A1. Are there others? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has risen.

Member Miyashiro: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I'm not going to talk a really long time about this. One thing that's overlooked in this whole thing, when we're talking about the orphan wells and who's going to pay for them, is that there's a lot of money in back taxes owed to rural municipalities because of orphan wells, hundreds of millions of dollars in unpaid taxes that are owed not just to the lessees but also to the municipalities. There has been work going on on this for a number of years. I know this government has exacerbated that problem by relieving oil companies of the responsibility for horizontal property taxes, which also just increases this amount of money.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs knows this well enough, having been a municipal councillor, and knows how difficult it is. Every cent that's owed you that's not paid, you have to increase taxes on your ratepayers. We've heard that there have been problems in all municipalities with government overreach and not being able to pay what they owe. What this is doing is causing a sure tax revenue source for rural municipalities to not be able to be paid.

This amendment doesn't do anything because all it's telling is that the government is going to keep doing what they're doing, which has really been not much. They're lessening the expectations of the original motion by – I mean, the wording is just making it so that you can just float by rather than just actually do what the original motion said.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to end my comments by saying that this amendment should not pass. The actual motion, the original motion, needs to pass, and we need to figure out how to get these rural municipalities the money that's owed them.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to oppose the amendment brought forward by the Member for Camrose, and I stand firmly in

support of the original Motion 523 as introduced by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. This motion calls on the government to finally take seriously the polluting liability crisis. This is a crisis that threatens not only the environment, but it is a crisis that threatens the public trust, the rural landowners, and the future generations of this beautiful province.

We're watching \$33 billion to \$100 billion in liabilities, nearly 80,000 wells that require reclamation, yet the financial security collected from the industry falls far short of even the lowest estimates. That's a crisis by any reasonable measure. We're talking about 200,000 wells that now qualify as mature under Alberta's own mature asset strategy. This growing cohort of aging infrastructure, Mr. Speaker, is without sufficient oversight, and without an effective cleanup regulatory mechanism it will risk the future of this province, the environment, and future generations.

[Mr. Rowsell in the chair]

That's not responsible resource development. It's actually regulatory negligence. A delay means, Mr. Speaker, under the current regulatory framework, that companies can indefinitely delay reclamations. Each inactive well today is a ticking time bomb. It risks leaking methane into the air, it can contaminate groundwater, and it represents a broken promise to the stewardship of the environment. Every year of delay means higher cleanup costs. These higher cleanup costs and greater public risk put Alberta's future at risk. We don't run our household finances like that. We don't raise our children to leave their messes behind. We do teach them to clean up their messes.

Mr. Speaker, to those who care about responsible development, about rural property rights, and about the long-term well-being of our economy and the environment, I urge them to reject the amendment and support the motion and the latest amendment brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. Let's not weaken the motion that finally tells the truth about Alberta's well liability crisis. Let us instead stand united in support of the original Motion 523 and signal that Alberta can lead, not lack, when it comes to cleanup, when it comes to stewardship, and when it comes to integrity.

5:50

Mr. Speaker, the liability crisis is really a problem. It is a problem that requires urgent attention from all members of this Assembly. It is not an incident of one time. It is going to have an implication and impact generationally, whether it is an economic impact or whether it is an environmental impact, and those implications will last long. It will cost us more, whether it is financial or whether it is environmental risks.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of the Assembly to support Motion 523 and this amendment as presented by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and not water down the motion and its principles, which are seeking that companies should pay and clean up their messes. It is what Albertans asked us. It is what Albertans expect us as the stewards of the province in terms of making sure that we protect the province. It is the people as well as it is the environment. I urge all the members to take the matter seriously and consider that this motion is a motion that will protect today's and future generations of this province. With that, I am encouraging all members to reconsider and support the motion as presented by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Are there others who want to speak to amendment A1?

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Acting Speaker: We'll go to the main motion. There's time left to debate. Go ahead if you want to debate. [interjection] No, I know.

Anyone else? Go ahead. The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in favour of this motion. It's an important motion brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. He did explain how much work we need to do and how government needs to be willing to step up to do that work and uphold the basic principle that we know as the polluter-pay principle.

[The Speaker in the chair]

We all know that liabilities out there in successive Conservative governments have failed to address that, and that's why over the years that liability has been racking up. It's in the billions of dollars. Oftentimes I think we don't even know correctly how much the liability is. I hope that all members of this Legislature know that they need to take this liability seriously and address this. I ask all members to support this motion.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing and hearing none, I am prepared to call on the hon. member to close debate. He has five minutes to do so.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and urge all members to defeat the amended motion because, as I said in response to the amendment that the Member for Camrose brought forward, it entirely undoes the original intent of the motion as I originally presented it.

You know, I want to thank my friends from Banff-Kananaskis and Lethbridge-West and Edmonton-Decore and my sometimes friend from Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, who offered their comments, and one of the themes in their statements was making sure that the people who make the messes are responsible for cleaning them up. They often drew on the analogy of asking their children to clean up their room. So if I could put it in those terms, Mr. Speaker, the original intent of this motion was to get the kids to clean up their room. The amended motion says that as long as the kids have picked

up a couple of their dirty socks, then the job is done and the kids are off the hook. That is not the original intent of the motion.

We know that the oil and gas companies are not taking their retirement obligations seriously. I had not heard any of the members opposite raise any objections to the figures that I raised with respect to CNRL's outstanding environmental liabilities or try to explain why it's acceptable in their view to let CNRL clean up those liabilities on a 68-year time horizon. We haven't heard that from any of the members opposite.

Moreover, they want to talk about the good work that they're doing, but the work that the Alberta Energy Regulator is doing on the cleanup of oil and gas liabilities is shrouded in so much secrecy that the people of Alberta have no idea what's actually going on. They don't know why there is a required spend. They have no idea what each individual licensee is required to spend in cleaning up their environmental obligations. They won't be honest about how much the environmental liabilities total. They have no idea what characterizes a high-risk licensee. They won't tell the people why they charge a certain fee for the Orphan Well Association on the industry. There's no transparency in any part of the liability management framework that the government has. So we cannot trust them when they say that they've got this problem well in hand. They don't, and this amended resolution is continuing to propagate the fantasy that the government is doing a good job when, in fact, nothing could be further from the truth.

For those reasons, I urge all members to vote down this motion and stand up to protect taxpayers, now and in future generations, from cleaning up the mess that oil and gas companies are leaving behind. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has closed debate on Motion Other than Government Motion 523 as amended.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 523 as amended carried]

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 4 and the clock showing very clearly 6 p.m., the House stands adjourned until this evening at 7:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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