



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, May 12, 2025

Day 110

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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Vacant, Edmonton-Ellerslie
Vacant, Edmonton-Strathcona

Party standings:

United Conservative: 47

New Democrat: 36

Independent: 2

Vacant: 2

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Chair: Mr. Sabir

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Eggen
Hunter
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, May 12, 2025

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good afternoon, hon. members.

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

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. Michael Peters. I invite all to participate in the language of their 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 Deputy Speaker: The Legislative Assembly is grateful to be situated upon Treaty 6 territory. This land has been the traditional region of the Métis people of Alberta, the Inuit, and 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 also acknowledge that the province of Alberta exists within treaties 4, 7, 8, and 10 territories and the Métis Nation of Alberta.

You may be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we have a number of school groups, starting with the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Lundy: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I do have a school group to introduce, the grade 6 students from école Bellevue school in Beaumont. I met with them earlier. They had some great questions. I'd like to ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly grade 6 students from Florence Hallock school. It's a few blocks away from my constituency office. I ask students and educators to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is a pleasure to welcome friends and students from Mill Woods. They attend Satoo elementary. I had the pleasure of visiting with them in Read In Week and bringing

them a Legoslatute. I ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, it's my pleasure to introduce guests who are at the Legislature today for the public service orientation. They are participating in a full-day orientation program which explores the legislative, budgetary, and committee processes. This will enable each participant to apply their knowledge to their role within the public service. Thank you for joining us today. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia.

Member Batten: Excellent. Hi. Through you and to you, Madam Speaker, I rise to welcome my partner, Keith Guinn, to the House. If everyone could give the normal welcome of claps to him, that would be great. Can you rise, please?

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

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to recognize the Sohail family, who have been pillars of Calgary's Pakistani community since 1998. Sohail Kashif; his wife, Shazia; and their children Roshni, Alisha, and Ali have contributed immensely through media, volunteerism, and community service. As a volunteer I've had the honour to work with Sohail and Shazia for many years. May I ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to rise and welcome back a friend of the Legislative Assembly. Dwight Dibben has served as the chief of staff to four cabinet ministers before being appointed deputy clerk of Executive Council and deputy secretary in cabinet 2010. After serving in these roles, Dwight was appointed as Alberta's eighth Public Service Commissioner. Dwight now works as the CAO for his hometown of Forestburg in the Camrose constituency. He also serves as a volunteer firefighter and a public school trustee in the Battle River school division. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Chamber.

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

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my friend Steve McComish and his home-school group, joined by more than 15 young Albertans who will soon be the pillars of the province. Met with them earlier today. They had some great questions. They come from the Edmonton area, including families from Westlock, Beaumont, and Leduc. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce two amazing guests today in the gallery, Stuart Gale and John Williams of Alberta Public Affairs Corporation, who represent the Alberta Native friendship centres, who we had a great meeting with this morning. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Industrial Carbon Price

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Alberta's government is freezing its TIER price to help industry stay competitive, defend jobs amid economic turmoil created by U.S. tariffs and uncertainty in Ottawa regarding carbon price increases and interference. With U.S. tariffs disrupting supply chains, creating uncertainty for Alberta industry, it's becoming harder to operate efficiently to stay competitive. With the Liberal government in Ottawa continuing to prop up disastrous laws like Bill C-69 and increasing regulatory pressures, investor confidence is being hurt at the worst possible time. For a decade Ottawa has blocked pipelines, cancelled energy projects, and added layer after layer of job-killing regulations. Enough is enough. We need a new approach.

We are global leaders in responsible energy development and environmental stewardship, and we'll continue to lead the way with or without Ottawa's help. We will continue to steward our environment, reduce emissions all while creating prosperity, not shutting down industries, killing jobs, or sacrificing our strong economy. That's why, by freezing the price, industry will pay \$95 per tonne of emissions in '25 and '26 instead of it soaring to \$110 next year, saving millions and keeping our province and country powered for decades. This move provides certainty, stability, and economic relief to key industries like oil and gas, electricity, petrochemical, manufacturing, cement, pulp and paper, mining, forestry, and others that pay into the TIER fund. By freezing the price while the feds push up increases, we are defending the businesses that drive our economy and the jobs that tens of thousands of families rely on.

Industry is at the heart of Alberta, and we will continue to keep it competitive and strong. We will not allow it to be shut down or risk falling behind during these challenging times.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Government Priorities

Member Irwin: Each and every day I hear from so many Albertans who are worried, worried about their children's progress in a crowded classroom, worried about whether they'll get the hip replacement they've been scheduled for for over 18 months, worried about how they'll pay rent. Health care, education, housing: these are all things that the provincial government is responsible for, but we're hearing very little from the UCP on the issues that so many of you are worried about. An odd approach. After all, isn't it the job of our government to provide good education, accessible health care, and make sure you can afford your basic needs?

1:40

While I've never seen the UCP do enough to address these worries, lately our Premier has appeared fully out of touch with the everyday needs of Albertans while she's spewing separatist rhetoric and introducing legislation that disenfranchises entire communities. Take Bill 54, which among other things brings back dark money into elections, makes it harder for Albertans to vote by eliminating vouching, and makes the likelihood of a referendum on Alberta's separation from Canada almost inevitable. As the Premier fans the flames of separatism, Indigenous communities watch in real time their treaties be violated. This is not okay.

But Albertans, we aren't so easily fooled. We see what she's doing: distract, divide, deflect. We see a Premier desperate to keep her party together no matter the cost, a Premier so mired in corruption that destructive distraction is the only card she knows how to play. I know you're worried. I know how hard it is to watch the seeds of division being sowed at a time when you're worried about affordability, access to a family doctor, your kids' education,

and so much more. It's time to let the Premier know that we don't want more of her smokescreens and doublespeak. We want a government that does their job, and if they're not interested in doing it, there's a whole lot of us on this side of the House who are ready to get to work right now for Albertans.

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

Calgary LRT Green Line

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Alberta's government is committed to building a green line that not only delivers a great value for taxpayers but also enhances public transit in Calgary, ensuring long-term economic benefit for our province. I am pleased to note that the new alignment proposed by the provincial government has been approved by the Calgary city council, aligning our efforts with a common vision for Calgary's south-to-north light rail transit line. This extended route will take the green line further south to Shepard, increasing ridership potential and maintaining strong connections to Calgary's existing transit network.

The new alignment is expected to result in 60 per cent more daily riders with an anticipated 51,200 people using the line each day. Additionally, the alignment will span 17.2 kilometres, 76 per cent longer than the 9.8 kilometres previously approved by the city council, and include 12 stations instead of seven.

Alberta's \$1.53 billion commitment to the green line remains steadfast and reflects our dedication to responsible infrastructure investment. This investment will improve accessibility, increase transit capacity, and provide long-term benefits to Albertans. By directly integrating with Calgary's Red and Blue lines, the green line will better serve commuters, connect with the new event centre, and support Calgary's ongoing economic growth.

With this strategic and forward-thinking plan we have a real opportunity to create a green line that will serve Calgarians for generations to come, contributing to the city's long-term success and sustainability.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Teachers' Contract Negotiations

Ms Chapman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Education in Alberta under this UCP government is not working. This past winter education support workers went on strike to fight for improved working conditions and fairer wages. Last week more than 60 per cent of teachers voted to reject the UCP's offer. They did this not only because the wage increase didn't go far enough but to push for safer standards and to address concerns of classroom complexity. Teachers will soon have to decide whether to vote in favour of a strike, and parents across the province will have to brace for the potential impact on their lives and the lives of their kids.

What is this government doing to prevent this strike? The answer is not much, Madam Speaker. Alberta has the lowest per-student funding in the country. Classroom sizes continue to grow with the influx of people coming here. Thousands of students remain unfunded, and the UCP stopped reporting class sizes. Unlike Ontario, B.C., Quebec, and soon Saskatchewan, Alberta does not account for classroom size or complexity when it comes to teacher compensation. All the while Alberta teachers are working harder and longer for less, having seen just 5.8 per cent wage growth over the past decade despite inflation being 30 per cent.

Education is one of the best ways to ensure the future success of our kids and the prosperity of our province. Our children need to learn and we need to be doing the utmost to guarantee that conditions are

meeting this critical moment for them. Sadly, as in so many areas where actual governance is required, this UCP government is nowhere to be found.

It's time for a change. It's time for competent government. Alberta's kids are counting on us.

Calgary Stampede

Mr. McDougall: Madam Speaker, as our government's representative on the board of the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede, I am honoured to rise and recognize one of the world's most iconic celebrations of culture, community, and commerce: the Calgary Stampede. For over 110 years the Calgary Stampede has proudly showcased Alberta's western heritage, culture, and hospitality. Known globally as the Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth, the Stampede brings the world to Alberta and Alberta to the world.

This year's Stampede, running from July 4 to 13, promises to be one of the most dynamic in recent times, with country music legend Shania Twain as parade marshal and global artists like Yung Gravy, TLC, and Natasha Bedingfield joining over 100 acts across four stages. The expanded BMO Centre and new rodeo events like Ladies Breakaway Roping show how the Stampede builds on tradition while embracing the future.

Beyond the rides, rodeo, and midway excitement, the Calgary Stampede is a major economic engine. Last year it drew over 1.47 million visitors and fuels tourism, hospitality, and retail sectors across Calgary and Alberta.

But none of this would be possible, Madam Speaker, without the heart and soul of the Stampede: its volunteers. Two weeks ago we celebrated National Volunteer Week, and as a board member I see first-hand the dedication of the more than 3,000 volunteers across 35 committees and partners who make this event possible. Their commitment ensures that the Stampede continues to reflect the best of Alberta and delivers a world-class celebration year after year.

As we look forward to another unforgettable Stampede, I encourage all Albertans to take part in this world-class celebration of our culture, heritage, and community spirit. Whether you're cheering at the rodeo, enjoying a ride, attending a concert, or volunteering, there's something for everyone. You all make Alberta stronger, more vibrant, and, truly, the greatest place to live, work, and raise a family.

Bill 54

Member Brar: Madam Speaker, this UCP government isn't just following antidemocratic practices; it is busy publishing the playbook that weakens our democracy. Bills 50, 51, and 54 are the package of the most antidemocratic legislative agenda in Alberta's history. They are making it harder for anyone who might not vote Conservative to even cast a ballot. They are bringing back corporate donations and opening the door to unlimited dark money flowing into our elections. These bills will tilt the playing field permanently in favour of the UCP.

This week Alberta's Chief Electoral Officer confirmed what many of us have been warning. He raised serious red flags about Bill 54. It will reduce transparency and erode public trust. Madam Speaker, this government isn't strengthening democracy; it's dismantling it. All of it is paving the way for secessionist referendums designed to divide this province and distract from mounting scandals.

We believe in democracy, we believe in voting rights for every Albertan, and we believe in fair elections that encourage democratic participation and not hinder it. While the Premier panders to separatists, reopens the vault to corporate donors, and strips away the independent oversight, we will keep fighting for a democracy that works for every Albertan across the province,

not because it will benefit our party over another, but because it's the right thing to do.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Deputy Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition has question 1.

Investigation of Health Services Procurement

Ms Gray: Madam Speaker, the Minister of Justice is a long-time friend and relative of Sam Mraiche, who just so happens to be involved in contract after bloated contract from this government. The scandal about these contracts has consumed the government all spring. They've had to hand off files to the Auditor General, the RCMP, and even stand up a pretend version of a public inquiry. None of that happens without the Minister of Justice being involved, so why didn't the Premier require the minister to recuse himself when these issues came before cabinet?

Ms Smith: Madam Speaker, it would appear the Member for Edmonton North West and the former member from Edmonton-Strathcona are long-time friends of the person in question and that friendship started when they were in government and continued when they were in opposition. I think this is the reason why we need to make sure that we're not slandering the good name of people and that we do a proper investigation and find out whether there has been any wrongdoing. Some individuals have very long relationships with Alberta Health Services, and we need to make sure that those relationships were all appropriate. That's the reason why we've got a couple of investigations going on.

Ms Gray: Madam Speaker, the question is about only one individual, who is the sitting Minister of Justice in charge of all of these investigations.

The Premier claims that there's no conflict, but Sam Mraiche is a long-time friend and relative to the Justice minister, and the appearance of even a potential conflict of interest should be enough cause for the Minister of Justice to fully recuse himself, especially when this person, this friend and relative, is at the heart of the scandals. Why has the Premier allowed the Minister of Justice to continue in his role, defending this government from scandals that involve his own contacts?

Ms Smith: Madam Speaker, as I mentioned, he appears to be a long-time friend of the MLA from Edmonton North West, and that's not sufficient to be casting aspersions against somebody's character. The member opposite is wrong. The Justice minister has nothing to do with overseeing these investigations. Judge Wyant is being overseen by the deputy minister of jobs and economy. The Auditor General has their own independent legislation, and they are also co-ordinating directly with the Deputy Minister of Health as well as counsel at AHS. This minister has nothing to do with it.

Ms Gray: But this government has everything to do with it because they have given contract after contract to this individual.

The Premier claimed last week that she didn't know that her minister was a relative of Sam Mraiche; he hadn't bothered telling her. If that's true, that's a very shocking thing for the minister to have withheld from the Premier while she asked his department to set up multiple investigations into the company known by friends and insiders. Given the minister's decision to withhold that extremely relevant connection for so long, will the Premier now remove the minister and call a public inquiry?

Ms Smith: No. Madam Speaker, I think the member needs to go back and reread what the Conflicts of Interest Act says. If there is a conflict of interest that a member is involved in, they have to recuse themselves from decision-making. The minister in question was never involved in any of this decision-making. All of the decision-making was done through Alberta Health Services, who established the RFP, put it out to bid, awarded the contract, and then negotiated the terms of it. This is all internal to Alberta Health Services. The Justice minister had nothing to do with it.

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

Alberta in Canada

Ms Gray: Madam Speaker, we now know that Bill 54 is not about battles that Alberta has with Ottawa. It's not about giving people a say in a referendum. The only reason the Premier introduced Bill 54 is to hold on to her party leadership. She knows that when divided, conservatives always come for their leader, but the government policy should not be about party politics or the Premier's own desire to stay in charge. The Premier has admitted that she introduced Bill 54 and opened a slippery slope to separatism for her own political agenda. Will she apologize to Albertans?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think it's the members opposite who are actually worried about their party falling apart because half of them want to be members of the federal party when they join, and half of them don't want to be members of the federal party when they join. I don't know if they're Mark Carney Liberals or if they're going to be whoever the new leader is of the NDP, but that's something that they've got to sort out. We have always felt that having single issues go to a vote of the general public through direct democracy is just a great way to be making decisions so that you don't have to have a single issue take over all of the debate. That's why we're doing it.

Ms Gray: Well, Albertans don't know if the Premier is a separatist. This is a problem. The Premier is acting because a new party with deep pockets has already sprung up. Probably a bit of a flashback for her, given she took over the Wildrose Party that split from the PCs. It's no surprise that for years of not getting things done, conservative forces are once again splintering. But the vast majority of Albertans support a strong, united Canada, and this country is more important to them than whether the Premier keeps her job. When so many issues in Alberta deserve a Premier's attention, why is the Premier planning to waste her summer courting separatists?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I mean, we on this side are waiting to see whether or not the party opposite rebrands officially to be the Alberta Liberals or if they try to pretend that they're still New Democrats. I guess we'll watch that play out over the summer.

On the question of policy, I've made my policy very clear. I'm going to be working with the new Prime Minister. We'll be establishing a special negotiating team to represent our province with the federal government in upcoming following reforms. We want to make sure we've got guaranteed corridor access. We want to end federal interference in our energy policy. We want to stop them from imposing import taxes, and we want to end the bad practice of equalization.

Ms Gray: The UCP government is under RCMP investigation into corruption. A million Albertans can't find a family doctor. Three major public-sector unions are on the verge of strike. The price of oil is way below Budget 2025 forecasts. Trump tariffs have already cost Alberta billions in investments. There is a measles crisis. There are wildfires destroying our Ukrainian heritage sites. Why, when the Premier's attention should be focused on so many things that matter to Albertans, is she so fixated on a process that could tear apart our country?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We on this side have competent ministers who are managing the files, and they are able to make good decisions on each one of those.

Meanwhile, I can tell you why it's important for us to be treated fairly by the federation and to not punish us, and it's because Alberta punches way above its weight as an economic driver to the country. Over the past 25 years Alberta has contributed over \$450 billion more in federal taxes than the province has received back in transfers and services. Alberta is also the largest consumer of products from the rest of the country.

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

Bill 54

Ms Gray: Madam Speaker, not only do we know Bill 54 is a divisive and harmful battle that this Premier is stoking, but we also now know the Chief Electoral Officer of Alberta has weighed in on how bad the government's latest attack on democracy is. He says the legislation will, quote, deteriorate the services provided to electors, compromise Albertans' trust in the democratic process, and remove elements of transparency and accountability. End quote. He lays out pages of problems with the legislation, like the erosion of his office's ability to investigate problems and election irregularities. Will the Premier be tabling amendments to fix these problems?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, some things we disagree on with the Chief Electoral Officer. For instance, we believe people should be able to have ID when they go and vote to prove who they are, so we've ended the practice of vouching. We've also ended the vote-anywhere machines and the vote-anywhere practice because, quite frankly, it takes weeks and weeks to determine the results of an election. We don't think that that's good for democracy either, but I do recognize their concern about investigation timelines, so I will be speaking with my Minister of Justice to see if there is any amendment that is needed.

Ms Gray: Madam Speaker, no government should disagree with transparency, accountability, and the ability to investigate. The Premier is undermining the very freedoms Albertans have to vote. The legislation attacks the ability for Albertans to vote while moving around their own province for work or education or otherwise. Albertans in work camps won't be able to vote. Students studying away from home won't be able to vote either. Why does the Premier support such undemocratic legislation that restricts Albertans' ability to exercise their right to vote?

Ms Smith: Well, Madam Speaker, that is not the case. We are going to continue with the practice of having advanced ballots in the riding, and of course they can vote on election day in the riding, but we're also expanding the use of special ballots so that anybody can

order them for any reason. There'll be a longer time frame so they can receive them. We want to make sure that every person who wishes to vote in the upcoming election has the ability to do so.

2:00

Ms Gray: The legislation has been flawed from the start. First Nation chiefs have called it garbage, the Chief Electoral Officer has called it a deterioration of our democracy, and separatists have called it the spark they need to destroy our country and force a referendum. Madam Speaker, no one wants Bill 54 unless they want it for the wrong reason. No one but extremists thinks this is good legislation. Will the Premier do the right thing and kill Bill 54?

Ms Smith: Well, Madam Speaker, there are a lot of changes that need to be made in the elections laws. There are five different bills that are being amended through this process. It's over 100 pages long. There is perhaps an opportunity to make some amendments, and there will be amendments that will be coming forward. That's what you do. It's the whole process. You put the bill forward; you hear feedback. If there are some modifications you need to change, you do that in Committee of the Whole. We look forward to addressing some of the concerns that we've heard about.

Ms Pancholi: Madam Speaker, free and fair elections are paramount to a stable democracy, the confidence of Albertans in their elected officials and their government, and our province's reputation. But in a letter sent on Friday to the Minister of Justice and to all MLAs the Chief Electoral Officer of Alberta stated that the UCP's Bill 54 will, quote: deteriorate the service provided to electors, compromise Albertans' trust in the democratic process, and remove elements of transparency and accountability. It's as if the UCP is taking pointers from the authoritarian activities of the Trump administration. Why did the Premier even table such undemocratic legislation?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Bill 54, of course, is about increasing the confidence and transparency and accountability in our election systems. We've had the opportunity to meet and consult with Elections Alberta and the elections CEO. We've taken their advice, and we've incorporated some of that into the bill. I am in receipt of that letter that we received late last week. The Premier has just mentioned that we are looking at that. We are contemplating amendments to help address those concerns, so the member can be confident that this government is responsive to the concerns of Elections Alberta.

Ms Pancholi: It's incredible that the UCP didn't think to talk to the elections officials before they tabled Bill 54. The Chief Electoral Officer was particularly concerned that the UCP's changes to the bill will impact the ability to investigate those who breach election finance laws. In his letter he says that under Bill 54 none of the significant investigations undertaken by his office in the last five years would have happened and several current ones would end. Maybe that's the point. Almost all the significant election financing investigations in the past few years have involved one particular political party and their third-party supporters, the UCP. Will the Premier admit that, along with enabling separatism, Bill 54 is about corruption and covering up wrongdoing by her own party?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much again, Madam Speaker. Once again for the hon. member and all members of the Assembly, we did consult and engage with Elections Alberta prior to tabling this bill. We received input from Elections Alberta and the elections

CEO, a lot of which is incorporated in this bill. Once again, we are looking at the letter that we received on Friday with the suggestions made by the elections CEO, and we will be likely introducing an amendment to address those concerns.

Ms Pancholi: The Chief Electoral Officer's concerns are straightforward, and the Minister of Justice should have listened to him before. He says that our democracy will lose transparency and accountability if the government pushes through Bill 54. It's no small thing, Madam Speaker, to revoke the rights Albertans have to free and fair elections. The Chief Electoral Officer has listed a number of amendments and has offered his assistance to the government to make those important amendments to preserve Albertans' trust in our democracy. The minister has committed to making those amendments. Can the minister also commit that there will be full opportunity for all members of this Assembly to debate those amendments to Bill 54 in its totality?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Once again, the letter from the elections CEO is being considered. We are looking at the suggestions very carefully. The bill is moving through this Assembly. There is robust debate on the bill. It will be going into Committee of the Whole, we'll be able to introduce amendments to address those concerns, and all members of the Assembly will be able to weigh in on it.

Investigation of Health Services Procurement (continued)

Mr. Sabir: Madam Speaker, last week we learned that Sam Mraiche, who is at the centre of the corrupt care scandal, is a family member and friend of the Minister of Justice. This same minister has responded to a lot of questions in this House defending the Minister of Health in a lawsuit that includes allegations of interference to benefit Sam Mraiche. This is a serious conflict of interest, and it's been a week. Why hasn't the minister stepped down, or has he removed himself from all investigation connected to Sam Mraiche?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, you can't remove yourself from an investigation you weren't involved in from the beginning. We are elected officials. We don't investigate things. We have initiated Judge Wyant to look over this for a judicial review. He's former Chief Justice of Manitoba. We also have the Auditor General looking at this as well as the RCMP. That is three robust investigations that are happening concurrently. I hope that satisfies the members, but I suspect it will not.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the Minister of Justice defended hiring legal counsel, including Rose LLP, to manage communication between public servants and the Auditor General, a move that the Auditor General said created serious barriers to transparency, given that these barriers can benefit the Minister of Justice's family member and friend Sam Mraiche, to the minister: how is it acceptable that he is defending hiring a private law firm and deciding how much taxpayer money is used all the while that firm is shielding a corruption investigation involving his own family member and friend?

Mr. Schow: Madam Speaker, it would appear that the members opposite are playing very fast and loose with the facts. They would

know very clearly that it was not the Minister of Justice who was involved with incorporating legal counsel on this. That was the Department of Health.

I also find it a bit odd that the members opposite are using this as an opportunity to malign the character of the Minister of Justice. It is not against the rules of this Chamber to have friends and to have relatives, Madam Speaker. Heaven knows the Member for Edmonton-North West and Rachel Notley had the exact same friend while they were in government.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the Minister of Justice also oversees the prosecution services and he has been the point person for government response on this scandal, given that he has answered questions in this House for weeks about a scandal involving his own close relative and friend without disclosing that conflict to the public, how can this minister rightfully stay in his role when he is personally tied to the very contracts and individuals who are involved in multiple investigations, including the RCMP?

Mr. Schow: Madam Speaker, if only there was a real lawyer on the opposition who could help explain this better to them, but unfortunately that appears to not be the case. What I'd say is that Alberta Justice routinely handles all relationships with external counsel. This is being treated like any other file that uses external counsel. Legal counsel has been retained to defend the government against the false allegations by the former AHS CEO.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: A point of order has been noted at 2:08.
The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Energy Policies and Industry Competitiveness

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Alberta industries are now being challenged by the threat of U.S. tariffs, which are causing trade uncertainty, and after more than a decade of eco radical approach coming out of Ottawa, adding additional costs and punitive regulations all in the effort to shut down our major industries. But this morning our government announced bold steps to defend our industries and its workers. To the minister of environment: what did our government just announce to ensure that industries remain competitive and protected during these challenging times?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. We have seen 10 years of activist-driven antienergy and antibusiness ideological policy from this federal Liberal and NDP government. It has crushed productivity and competitiveness, and it has put at risk our province and our country, even greater risk from tariff threats that we are seeing south of the border. We can't risk falling behind right now. We can't put jobs and our economy at risk. That's why, effective immediately, we are freezing the industrial carbon price.

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

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that Alberta is freezing the TIER price at \$95 per tonne all while the current federal pricing schedule is expected to almost double by 2030 and further given that Albertans voted overwhelmingly in the last federal election for a government to lower taxes and support our energy development, to the minister of environment: what can the new

Mark Carney led government in Ottawa do to learn from this week's announcement and follow Alberta's lead?

2:10

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and I want to thank the member for the question. We have heard two stories in two different areas of the country in two different official languages about the approach that this Prime Minister is going to take. However, if the new Prime Minister wants to show his commitment to protecting the Canadian economy and jobs not only here in Alberta but across the country, protect energy security by taking a common-sense approach, then they will stop interfering in provincial jurisdiction, stop freezing out investment, and allow the provinces to go back to regulating our own industries. The Liberals need to start listening to the common sense of Canadians.

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

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker and to the minister. Given that Alberta has long been a leader across the country in reducing emissions and stewarding our environment and given that Ottawa has missed every single climate target they've ever set and increasing carbon taxes both on consumers and industry hasn't worked and further given that the new government has planned to continue this environmental activism of the previous government, to the minister: can you please share how we are continuing to lead the way in environmental stewardship while defending the economy and our major industries?

Ms Schulz: Madam Speaker, we are leaders in energy production and environmental stewardship, and we will always stand up for the best interests of Albertans. Other nations are looking to us to meet their needs for safe, affordable, reliable energy and, of course, energy security as well as meeting their environmental goals. They see us as the answer to displacing less environmentally responsible produced energy elsewhere. We are doing this by working with industry, not against them, to reduce emissions and do the right thing for the environment while doubling production to meet global rising demand.

Affordable Housing

Ms Hoffman: The UCP government has done nothing to address the cost-of-living crisis, which is out of control here in Alberta. Edmonton and Calgary have the highest rate increases for rent in the country. The government has been forcing many public-sector union workers onto the streets by failing to offer increases that keep up with the cost of living. Many of the wonderful staff who take care of this very building are making less than \$700 a week, Madam Speaker. Will the government either cap rent increases or offer salary increases that keep up with the cost of living?

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

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I've been excited to talk about housing for a while in the Chamber. We are very excited in this province to continue to lead the way anywhere in the country, to create the most houses anywhere in the country. What the hon. member doesn't want to talk about is that rent is going down in Alberta. In fact, this went down by 7.8 per cent in the city of Calgary. We bet on industry and Albertans to get houses built. They wanted to

stop construction, and they thought somehow that would magically lower rent, which is why we didn't listen to the opposition. We have the best housing in the country.

Ms Hoffman: Madam Speaker, given that nothing could be further from the truth and given that government's proposed salary increases aren't even close to the rent increases of 6 to 9 per cent across Alberta last year alone and given that we've already heard from people facing 200 per cent rent increases here in Edmonton, given that we are the biggest province without rent caps – even Doug Ford has them because he knows that they're fair and they're popular – will the current government finally put the rent increase caps that we desperately need in and build affordable public housing, or are they happy being reverse Robin Hood, making rich landlords richer and poor people lose their homes?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Madam Speaker, you just heard it right there. They're anti job creators and businesses. They only want to focus on the union, who runs their party.

I will point out that the only jurisdictions who brought in rent caps in this housing situation, Ontario and Vancouver, have the highest rent, and people are fleeing those provinces to come to our province to flee that rent, Madam Speaker. What the NDP are trying to do would damage the housing market and make more people homeless. We're not going to do that. We refuse to follow that direction because we are going to do what's right for Albertans.

Ms Hoffman: Given that education support staff throughout the province were on the streets on strike, some for many months, and given that 60 per cent of teachers rejected the UCP's offer and now are also considering a strike, given that the government has jacked up education property taxes – and let's be clear that those funds are not directed to education; they go into general revenue for the UCP's budget – but it doesn't do anything other than make people mad at municipalities for it being on their municipal tax statement and their local school boards when they're not actually getting that money, why hasn't the provincial government been forthright with voters, and why are they so focused on making the rich richer and making everyone else pay for it?

Mr. Nixon: Madam Speaker, well, that's trying to sneak in an extra question, but I'm very, very excited to continue to discuss what's taking place with housing.

Province-wide housing starts are up by 32 per cent; in Edmonton up by 39 per cent, in Calgary up by 24 per cent, in Lethbridge up by 194 per cent. That's because we bet on Albertans. The NDP don't like Albertans. They always want to bet against them, to attack our very way of life inside this province, and they want to bring in things like damaging rent control with economists that compare it to bombing our cities. The United Conservative Party doesn't want to bomb our cities. We want to build our cities, unlike the NDP.

Film and Television Industry Support

Member Ceci: Last Monday the President of the United States announced on social media a devastating 100 per cent tariff on international film and television. The Premiers of B.C. and Ontario responded immediately to say that they'll stand up for film and television workers against threats from the U.S. President. The Alberta Premier, on the other hand: well, crickets, all the while spending thousands and thousands of taxpayers' dollars travelling to the U.S. on a so-called trade mission that only came back with a selfie. Why hasn't the minister or the Premier done anything to protect film and television workers in Alberta against Trump's tariffs?

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

Ms Fir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Alberta's film and television industry is booming and continues to boom. Filmmakers from the United States and really all over the world continue to come here for our world-class skilled talent and filmmakers, breathtaking scenery, amazing tax credits that are offered by both my colleague in Jobs, Economy and Trade and the tax credits in my ministry as well. I've been to L.A. last year. I heard first-hand from producers and executives.

An Hon. Member: Last year?

Ms Fir: I didn't go this year, as the members opposite are chirping, due to the fires.

Member Ceci: Given that Trump's tariffs are an economic gut punch to Alberta's screen industry and given that under a 100 per cent tariff a \$10 million production would face an additional \$10 million in tariffs, making distribution impossible and given that this minister has offered no plan, no strategy, even though she knows this will crush the industry here, does the minister still believe that the Premier's negotiations on tariffs were a big win for our province's film and television industry, or will she admit Alberta got played once again?

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

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Over the last few years our world-class film and television tax credit has supported over 200 productions filming films and television series in Alberta. This has created over 14,000 jobs. It's resulted in a billion and a half dollars being spent in our economy. The members opposite are trying to sow fear. They're trying to scare an industry, and if they aren't, can they please tell me what the changes are? What are the tariffs that have been introduced by the U.S. on film?

Member Ceci: Given that these Trump tariffs could apply to TV shows like *The Last of Us*, which generate \$141 million for the Alberta economy and given that workers need the UCP to step up and make a plan so that film studios and television and film workers in Alberta will continue to make their living in this field despite the devastating tariffs that could be coming and given that other provinces have acknowledged this threat and are doing something about it, can the minister outline her plan to protect Alberta's film and television industry, or doesn't she have one?

Mr. Jones: Madam Speaker, again I didn't hear any impact that the member opposite is suggesting that we address. Of course, we've heard rhetoric from the U.S. administration on potential tariffs. We've seen those not come on, come on, come off, be delayed. Maybe that's how the members opposite would govern. Maybe that's why they were the only single-term government in Alberta's history. We are going to deal with what comes in front of us. We're going to support our industry as we are with \$235 million in film and television tax credit over the next three years. We've added additional genres. We have a unique all-spend tax credit here that is considered top in North America.

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

Bill 50

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This fall Albertans will head to the polls for municipal elections. Albertans deserve strong,

collaborative municipal governments. The Minister of Municipal Affairs has tabled the Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, to deliver this to Albertans. This legislation will help build stronger and more resilient communities across our province. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: how will your proposed legislation ensure that Albertans have strong, collaborative municipal councils?

2:20

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Most councils are able to work together just fine. That said, in recent years we have seen some cases of codes of conduct being weaponized against other council members. This can cause significant dysfunction amongst council members and distract them from doing their job. Our proposed legislation will put an end to weaponization of these codes of conduct and create a standardized approach in co-operation with the municipalities themselves that will ensure council members can focus on building stronger communities and being more resilient. We'll also be working with municipalities to shape new guidelines for the conduct and explore what the office of municipal ethics commissioner would look like. Again, we will do that with municipalities.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that some municipal councils have seen their codes of conduct work for them and given that some of them have seen it cause disruption and disharmony and further given that you are planning on implementing a standardized code of conduct for municipal councils, to the same minister: how would the standardization of codes of conduct create harmony for municipal councils across Alberta?

Mr. McIver: Well, Madam Speaker, the hon. member is right by saying that in some cases the codes of conduct are working well. To be clear, we would have preferred to leave them in place during this time, but the lawyers that we deal with advised us that if even one council goes to court, then we have to wait with the legislation. We know that because we just waited about two years to put ICF legislation in place, which is also part of that bill. We're going to do our best to work with municipalities. We're going to work with them to develop with them new codes of conduct and a new plan for a provincial municipal ethics commissioner, and we believe that if we work with them, we'll get that done.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Madam Speaker and to the minister for his answer. Given that municipal councillors are accountable to voters and not to those who they disagree with on council and given that the ultimate accountability check for municipal councillors is in the upcoming fall election and further given that Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, also includes some of the housekeeping amendments to get our local elections ironed out, can the same minister please highlight the changes you're making to municipal elections this fall through this legislation?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Our proposed legislation builds on the positive changes we made in the spring last year. So many good things to talk about. We're refining the legislation to allow voter electoral assistance terminals for those with sight disabilities, which print a paper ballot to ensure that Albertans living with the sight disabilities are entitled to the same privacy and

independence as the rest of us when they cast their ballots. We're ensuring that the residents displaced by last year's wildfire in Jasper can take part in the democratic process by allowing them to vote and run for office if they intend to return to the community.

FOIP Requests and Access to Information

Mr. Ip: Madam Speaker, Alberta's Privacy Commissioner has confirmed that 27 government departments violated freedom of information laws, denying access, narrowing requests, and blocking public scrutiny in ways the law does not allow. This isn't just administrative failure; it's a direct attack on the public's right to hold their government accountable. How can this government defend violating FOIP legislation while claiming to respect the democratic rights of Albertans?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's true that the OIPC was looking at 30 complaints, most of which came from a newspaper based out of Toronto. All of those FOIP requests were deficient in some manner, but I am happy to tell you that 99 per cent of all FOIP requests are done on time and 97 per cent of all FOIP requests are completed without incident or complaint. We take access to information seriously in this province, and that's not going to change.

Mr. Ip: Given that the Privacy Commissioner found serious and repeated violations of FOIP law by this government and given that instead of fixing those violations, the UCP is now repealing FOIP and replacing it with a much weaker Access to Information Act, one that creates new exemptions to hide records involving cabinet ministers and the Premier, how can Albertans have any confidence in this government when instead of fixing its clear violations of the FOIP Act, it's changing the law to make it easier to hide information from Albertans?

Mr. Nally: Madam Speaker, here's what's really happening. We operate at a high level in this province when it comes to transparency and openness, and that's why our FOIP requests are 99 per cent on time and 97 per cent without incident or complaint. As you're aware, we brought forward some amendments in the fall of last year. We're currently working on those regulations as we speak. We will consider the feedback and the recommendations from the OIPC as we always do.

Mr. Ip: Given that this government is using Bill 46 to introduce Henry VIII clauses, creating the power to rewrite access to information laws by cabinet decree behind closed doors and given that it is clear this government is failing to meet even the basic standards of transparency legislation and given the government's ongoing refusal to call a public inquiry into the corrupt care scandal despite mounting evidence of potential political interference, how can Albertans trust this government to rewrite rules in secret when it's already knee-deep in scandal and is still determined to block transparency?

Mr. Nally: Madam Speaker, as I said already, 99 per cent of all FOIP requests are done on time and 97 per cent are done without complaint or incident. It is laughable coming from across the aisle because when they were in government, the OIPC criticized them for interfering with the FOIP process. They actually demanded that their officials turn over the names of people and organizations putting in FOIP requests. We don't do that in Western democracies. I'm not sure why they tried.

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

Energy Development Policies

Mr. Dyck: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Alberta is the home of some of the most extensive and sophisticated natural gas infrastructure in North America. Recent studies show that Alberta's proven natural gas reserves are significantly larger than previously estimated, now sitting at 130 trillion cubic feet. This means Canada now ranks in the top 10 countries globally in natural gas reserves and Alberta can continue to evolve into an energy superpower and should have the bargaining power to work with any sovereignty. To the Minister of Energy and Minerals: could you please outline our government's road map to positioning Alberta as a global energy leader?

Mr. Jean: Well, Madam Speaker, it is true; we are the answer to the world's energy needs. We have the fourth-largest reserve of oil in the world, the ninth-largest reserve of natural gas in the world. We have world-class programs like APIP and ACIP that see dollars coming in from around the world. We are the forefront of hydrogen development, a sector worth trillions of dollars globally. We are leading in extracting lithium from brine and working on getting titanium out of tailings ponds. We're doing so much. We are truly the answer to the world's energy needs. Alberta is the answer, and we're going to do everything we can to answer what they need.

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

Mr. Dyck: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given Alberta's vast natural gas reserves and world-class infrastructure and given that many of our global allies are urgently seeking reliable, secure, and ethically sourced energy and further given that Alberta is well positioned to be a preferred international energy supplier if not for the ongoing struggle to access energy markets, to the Minister of Energy and Minerals: what are the actions our government is taking to strengthen Alberta's energy diplomacy and expand market access to meet global energy demands?

Mr. Jean: It's true, Madam Speaker. The world has changed, and right now we're talking to countries like Korea, Japan, and even other Asian nations that want our energy and want it now. LNG Canada will become operational in just the next couple of weeks, becoming Canada's very first LNG export facility. It is the shortest route to Asia from North America, and it means there are tremendous opportunities. Even British Columbia and their ministers there are talking about opportunities, in particular dredging the Burnaby inlet and allowing bigger tankers to ship our heavy oil around the world. Canada is in it with Alberta. Alberta is in it with Canada. We are the answer for the world's energy needs.

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

Mr. Dyck: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that Alberta produces approximately 2.5 million tonnes of hydrogen annually and given that the production is primarily used for industrial processes like heavy oil upgrading, chemical manufacturing, and oil refinery and further given that hydrogen blending in natural gas can improve energy efficiency and reduce emissions, can the Minister of Affordability and Utilities explain how hydrogen blending will benefit our energy future?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Madam Speaker and to the member for that great question. I'm very pleased that last week we passed Bill 52,

the Energy and Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, because it enables hydrogen blending for residential and commercial heating. This will help improve energy reliability to our province, ensuring Albertans and their families have the heat they need now and, as the energy sector evolves choice, for the future. It also positions Alberta as a destination of choice for investors and innovators in this sector. I'm proud our government is advancing Alberta's position as a world leader in hydrogen. When you combine our industry, innovation, postsecondary research, and Alberta's pioneering spirit . . .

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

2:30

Bill 55 and Indigenous Health Care

Member Arcand-Paul: Madam Speaker, the medicine chest clause was a specific and negotiated covenant entered into between the Crown and First Nations under treaty. This clause transformed health care delivery for First Nations across the country. Now Albertans, including First Nations, watch as privatization of health care is being ushered in by the UCP through Bill 55. Does the Minister of Health know that the medicine chest covenant came into effect, and had she considered it before drafting Bill 55?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Of course, there is no privatization of health care happening in Alberta. We've been very, very clear on that.

We've worked very closely with First Nations. In fact, the member opposite should know that we had the modernizing Alberta's primary care system engagement sessions. We had specific ones just for the Indigenous community, and we had a panel that made recommendations. We're actually working on those recommendations, Madam Speaker. We have patient navigators. We have an innovation fund. We're continuing to provide services in conjunction with our First Nations.

Member Arcand-Paul: Given that Treaty 6 includes the medicine chest clause, which permits First Nation peoples to access health care how and when they want, and further given that health care is a right in this country for all people, especially a system that is publicly delivered and publicly funded, how does this government think it will be able to deliver the medicine chest right to health care under Bill 55 and the privatization efforts by the UCP of our health care system?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Again the members opposite and the NDP continue to put misinformation out there. We are not privatizing health care. In fact, we are making sure that there is a strong, publicly funded health care system available to all Albertans. In fact, more than \$25 million in new and additional resources are being invested directly to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities over the next two years to improve access to culturally safe primary health care programs. We're going to continue to work with First Nations to make sure that they have the health care they need.

Member Arcand-Paul: Given that this government is so willing to use First Nations to justify their ideological agenda, including the Enoch private surgical facility, yet provide no actual support to others and further given that First Nations in Alberta per the last census had a median income of \$33,000 per year compared to the non-Indigenous Albertan median income of \$88,000 per year, down from \$104,000 after our NDP government, what does the Minister of Health have to

say to low-income Albertans, including First Nations and disabled folks, that will be hurt through the privatization of health care under Bill 55?

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

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This government is not taking advantage of First Nations for political purposes. Members opposite, unfortunately, are. We have support from Treaty 6, including the former and current grand chief, when it comes to facilities like the recovery community: \$30 million, on-reserve, owned and operated by the Indigenous community, something members opposite would never have dreamed of doing.

On top of that, we're stepping into, happily, what is a federal responsibility on-reserve. We will do this because of Jordan's principle. We will do this because we care, because lives are being lost. I would like to see the federal government and members opposite step up to support recovery and Indigenous health care supported by this government.

Bill 54 and First Nation Treaty Rights

Member Tejada: Madam Speaker, this government has no regard for democracy or Confederation and has shown us time and time again that it does not respect treaties with First Nations. While it's not hard to find evidence of this, Bill 54 is the latest attack. The Premier seems to have forgotten that treaties 6, 7, and 8 were signed with the Crown well before Alberta existed and that the province and everyone who lives here is a signatory. Can this Premier unequivocally denounce separatism and admit that any citizen-led initiative that promotes separation is an affront to the treaties?

Mr. Wilson: Madam Speaker, I think we've made it clear that we are entirely committed to protecting and upholding the honour of the treaties. This government: we've been consistently advocating for a strong Alberta in a united Canada. I don't know if they're having problems hearing or just listening. A strong Alberta in a united Canada: that's our message.

Member Tejada: Given that the Treaty 7 chiefs from Bearspaw, Chiniki, and Tsuut'ina have expressed their opposition to Bill 54 and said that, quote, under our treaties vast areas of Alberta are held by interest by the Crown for the benefit of treaty First Nations, not as property of the provincial government, and given that Saddle Lake Cree Nation has said that Bill 54 is, quote, an act of hostility against our peoples and given that this government has made more nice sounds than progress on reconciliation, will the Premier finally walk the talk on respect for treaty and scrap Bill 54?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Not only do we entirely support upholding and honouring the treaties; we've created a multitude of programs and initiatives to make the lives of Indigenous peoples better in this province. Alberta is leading the country on economic reconciliation. Programs like our AIOC are now being copied by other provinces and even the federal government. We provide loan guarantees on major projects, and we've got our ABIF programs, our Aboriginal business investment fund programs. This government has created over 1,000 jobs for Indigenous people on reserves. It's unheard of across the country, and we're so proud of what we've done there.

Member Tejada: Given that we're talking about the business of democracy and this government voted down legislation that would enshrine reconciliation in every aspect and ministry in government and that should include access to democracy and given that Indigenous people in Canada have only been able to vote since 1961 – Bill 54 would disallow vouching for those without photo ID and stands to disproportionately impact Indigenous people, alongside other vulnerable populations. Can this government admit that Bill 54 is about this government choosing its voters and will actively suppress Indigenous voters in rural areas and cities?

Mr. McIver: In this case, Madam Speaker, the hon. member is mistaken. In fact, I can tell you that through our minister of social services there are navigation centres. Our goal is to make it so easy to get identification that everyone will be able to do it. Everyone will be able to vote. It's very much at the heart of what we're doing here. We're committed to it, and I would say: just watch us. Under this Premier it's exactly what we intend to do.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Rural Economic Development

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The town of Forestburg was once home to coal mines and a plant, which supported hundreds of jobs and the local economy. The NDP government's reckless coal phase-out was devastating for the town, eliminating 500 of those good-paying jobs. But the town is extremely resilient and developed a proposal for a medical waste incineration facility as the alternative to the Swan Hills plant, which is shutting down. This project would mean good jobs for Forestburg and revitalize the area. To the Minister of Health: why was the Forestburg project not chosen for the biomedical waste management contract, and will it be considered in the foreseeable future?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As the Swan Hills treatment facility is set for closure, we do recognize the importance of a seamless transition. Alberta Health Services initiated the request for proposal in spring of 2023, and they finalized a contract last year with Stericycle. The contract remains valid until 2032, ensuring long-term stability. Stericycle has been operating in Alberta for many years, and they continue to have a growing presence in Canada for biomedical waste management. We'll continue to evaluate all the providers fairly, and we will continue to fill contracts as needed.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the answer. Given that the current global economy is uncertain and it's created extra challenges for rural Albertan communities who want to retain their industries and residents and given that buying made-in-Alberta products can help support local producers like those in the Camrose constituency and further given our government's recent commitment to alter procurement practices to support Alberta- and Canada-based companies, to the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction: are escape clauses and cancellation clauses built into the provincial government contracts to protect Albertans as economic and geopolitical changes happen going forward?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction.

2:40

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Our government takes a strategic, forward-looking approach to all contracts to ensure we're protecting both Albertans and Albertans' economy. While the details vary from contract to contract, we build in safeguards that allow us to respond to changing conditions. Whether it's economic shifts or global events, we always make sure that Alberta is in position to adapt, protect our fiscal stability, and keep the province moving in the right direction.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the answer. Given our government's recent investment of \$8.5 million to support rural areas' access to utilities and given that \$5.7 million of that total will go to expanding and updating natural gas infrastructure and further given that \$700,000 of that total will support the construction of electrical services for farms and ranches, to the Minister of Affordability and Utilities: how will these grants be administered, and how will this funding help the communities in the Camrose constituency grow their economies, industries, and agriculture?

The Deputy Speaker: You've got to hand it to the member for her creativity and the questions not really relating to the main question, the supplemental, but here we are.

The hon. Minister of Affordability and Utilities.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Madam Speaker and to the member for her advocacy. I'd like to give a shout-out to the AFREA, the fed gas, and the Alberta Federation of Rural Water Co-ops for their amazing partnership. They disburse the grants of funding at the local levels such as through the Battle River Power Coop in the Camrose riding to ensure rural Albertans have access to the utilities they need. By improving access to gas, electricity, and water, we're helping rural communities attract new businesses, stimulate the economy as well as enhancing agricultural productivity by helping our farmers, ranchers, and producers put food on tables all over the globe. That's what our government is doing, and that's leadership.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes our question period today. In 30 seconds or less we'll continue with the remainder of the afternoon.

Notices of Motions

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Government Motion 69, sponsored by myself, which reads as follows. Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 46, Information and Privacy Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in third reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

I also wish to give oral notice of Government Motion 70, sponsored by myself, which reads as follows. Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 47, Automobile Insurance Act, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in third reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

Additionally, I wish to give oral notice of Government Motion 71, sponsored by myself, which reads as follows. Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 54, Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in Committee of the Whole, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

Finally, I wish to give oral notice of Government Motion 72, sponsored by myself, which reads as follows. Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 55, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in Committee of the Whole, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, ou en français Mme la Présidente. I rise this afternoon to table the five requisite copies of what I call, to my memory, an unprecedented warning letter from the Chief Electoral Officer to the Justice minister regarding the Election Commissioner's concerns about Bill 54 and how his office stands ready to support the legislation to introduce proposed amendments, and he is very concerned members of the Legislature have the information they need...

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, we'll read it when you table it. Thank you.

Mr. Dach: One more quick one that I referenced, Madam Speaker, in debate recently: Potential Dangers of Blending Hydrogen and Natural Gas in Pipelines, and I have the requisite five copies of the article from the Clean Energy Group.

The Deputy Speaker: Perfect.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to table two articles and the five requisite copies. One is an *Edmonton Journal* article highlighting that the Alberta NDP has equally strong ties with MHCare both when they were in power and afterwards, specifically calling out former Premier Notley and the Member for Edmonton-North West. The second one is an *Edmonton Journal* article, which is a letter from MHCare to the ADM of Jobs, Economy and Trade clearing up what they quote as misleading and inaccurate information. They are both submitted.

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

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I table the requisite copies of an article by Doug Cuthand from May 10 in the *Edmonton Journal*, titled Indigenous Leaders Stand Up to Separatism. In it they talk about the growing problem here in Alberta and on the prairies of racism and provincial governments that foster a me-first mentality.

Mr. Wiebe: Madam Speaker, I rise to table five requisite copies of a letter from the mayor and council of the town of Beaverlodge regarding untrue, unverified, and defamatory remarks made by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar in this Assembly on Thursday, May 8.

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

Ms Chapman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of an *Edmonton Journal* article: Alberta Chief Electoral Officer Warns UCP Proposals Will Hurt Investigative Ability. Great read for the Premier. It talks specifically about concerns around changes to timelines associated with special ballots.

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

Member Miyashiro: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm taking five copies of an e-mail sent to my office and to the Member for Lethbridge-East from Chris Schimanski, an AISH recipient in Lethbridge, who states that he is angry that this government is punching down on people living with disabilities by clawing back disability benefits.

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

Ms Hoffman: Thanks, Madam Speaker. I have two. The first is the letter from the Alberta Chief Electoral Officer to the government whip and chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices with regard to his grave concerns around impacting democracy and Bill 54.

The other one is from Drs. Manns, Meddings, and Parks, that ran in the *Edmonton Journal* on May 10, and it's around the need to stop health care privatization, which the current government is embarking on in Bill 55.

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

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today with three tablings and the requisite five copies of each. One, an article of the history of the Royal Bank of Canada noting their decision to leave Montreal in 1976 due to the political uncertainty from separation.

The second is an article discussing the estimated 3,000 businesses that left Catalonia after their referendum vote for separation.

The final one is New 'Independence Uncovered': Analysis Models True Cost of Taking Scotland out of the UK, from Scottish Business UK, estimating that 250,000 jobs could be lost, a loss of economic output, and also cuts to public-sector services in Scotland should they separate.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, just a friendly reminder that you need to be in your own chair until Orders of the Day.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm tabling a letter constituent Andrea Ruether sent me regarding the Premier fanning the flames of separatism and how she stands against that. I have the requisite copies.

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

Member Brar: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to table an article from the *Calgary Herald* titled Watchdog Slams Alberta for Access to Information Failures. This article clearly shows how much this government believes in freedom from information, especially when it is inconvenient. I table this for anyone who is searching for transparency with a flashlight during broad daylight. Here are the six copies.

2:50

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

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm tabling six letters and requisite copies from Calgarians who are concerned

with the closure of Evergreen Theatre, and they urge the minister of arts and culture to help find a way to keep that theatre open. They're from parents, from performers, and from users of studio space there.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a column by Don Braid entitled [Premier's] 'Outlet' for Separatists Puts Party over Country, in which he notes that the Premier admits her referendum strategy is designed to keep the UCP from splintering.

The Deputy Speaker: I suppose next time I'll ask if there isn't anyone to do tablings.

Hon. members, it is time for Orders of the Day, after we do points of order, and I'll try my second shot at that.

We have progressed today. I was misgendered less than half of a dozen times, so congratulations.

We have one point of order at 2:08. The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Yes. At 2:08 I rose to call a point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j), specifically focusing on (j). We should not be hurling insults at one another, but as I make my argument, I'll also remind the entire Chamber that we should not be doing indirectly what cannot be done directly.

At 2:08 the minister was responding to a question from the MLA for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, and I don't have the benefit of the Blues, so I look forward to you reminding me of the exact language, Madam Speaker. The Government House Leader, in fact, was heard to say something along the lines of the opposition doesn't have any good lawyers, real lawyers, questioning the professional credentials on this side of the House. Now, we do seem to be seeing a pattern of this. Questioning somebody's professional credentials happened last week to a member of the Official Opposition with both a masters and a PhD. I think that this is a clear example of lowering the debate. We're seeing personal attacks to avoid substantive policy questions, and I think it's something the government is getting too comfortable with. I was disappointed to see it happen from the Government House Leader. We literally had a credentialed lawyer stand up and ask a question, and then the Government House Leader say that there are no real lawyers in the opposition caucus, again, doing indirectly what is not allowed, lowering the decorum in this place, and I would ask him to apologize and withdraw.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that I wasn't directly referring to the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, I don't think it's a point of order. But I can certainly acknowledge that in this instance the language I used did not raise the level of decorum in this House, so I will apologize and withdraw.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, that was our only point of order.

Now we are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day
Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading

Bill 212

Organ and Tissue Donor Information Agreement Act

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

Dr. Metz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am proud to rise today in this Chamber to move second reading of Bill 212, the Organ and Tissue Donor Information Agreement Act.

I tabled the bill on May 28, 2024. It requires an agreement between Alberta and the Canada Revenue Agency to give Albertans the opportunity to consent through their tax return for their contact information to be shared with appropriate organizations such as the Alberta organ and tissue registry. Opted-in Albertans would then receive information about the tissue and organ donation process and potentially sign up to become a donor to support the hundreds of Albertans waiting for a transplant.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Calgary Confederation's previous Conservative MP Len Webber sponsored a federal bill. It was a private member's bill, which was agreed on unanimously, which allowed for this agreement. B.C., Ontario, and Nunavut have already followed through with provincial legislation.

Today I'm delighted to tell you that this bill has already been a success. The government announced last week that it is going to happen. I am delighted to have brought this forward. The 2025 tax form will include a checkbox where Albertans can request information about being an organ and tissue donor. Too bad it took a full year to have this action move forward. It is a very simple bill, and it could have led to a checkbox on the 2024 tax return.

Now, this success comes in a rather unusual way. Last week, when they announced that they would move forward with the exact action requested in the bill, I was surprised because this government has never ever passed a bill that was brought forward by a member of the NDP caucus, and at this time of fighting with everyone at every level of government, I assumed they would not want to do anything collaborative. So I am overjoyed that they have chosen to move on this bill. Of course, the existence of the bill wasn't actually mentioned in any of the press release so as to avoid acknowledging that we have some pretty good ideas on this side of the House.

Why is this bill important? Over 700 people in Alberta are desperately waiting for organ or tissue transplants according to the latest publicly available data. Even though we have over 844,000 Albertans already on the donor registry, the chances of a match for all of these other patients who need them is very, very slim. The intent of this bill is to provide information to Albertans so that they can make a choice to be added to the registry and therefore increase the number of people who register to become donors. In Ontario this number was reported to increase by 32 per cent since the checkbox was added to their income tax forms. We expect an increase in the number of people from diverse backgrounds who register as they are particularly needed as donors. They may have simply been less likely to come across the information about being a donor from other sources.

More Albertans are also becoming aware of other organ donation options such as living kidney donation. This bill will be a way to get the word out about living kidney donation as well, as it can be included in information provided. This is especially important to those who are already open to the idea of organ donation.

My neighbour Kelly has polycystic kidney disease and required dialysis since 2019. She has been hooked up to a dialysis machine six to eight hours a day, three times a week. She cannot work, and she requires help with child care. Family members need to drive her to and from dialysis. She is severely fatigued all of the time. She cannot participate in most family vacations, although arranging dialysis in another Alberta centre has allowed a rare, brief camping trip within the province. She recently missed watching her daughter compete in the Special Olympics in Europe.

This bill will likely help people like Kelly by increasing the number of people on the donor registry, but other measures that are even more critical in helping to bring transplant to more Albertans are needed. None of these could be included in a private member's bill because they all have some costs attached, although they do save us money in the longer term. I hope the minister will consider additional actions and act on them. I hope she consults with the clinical teams to understand the details of other needed steps and will allow them to share updates on what is in the works publicly. I ask her to do the right thing and to give people hope. There is no benefit to secrecy. I will continue to bring forward other good ideas.

3:00

It is important to invest in rapid transplants for the well-being of people themselves as well as for the economy. Dialysis costs up to \$100,000 per year per person. Transplant does have a slightly higher upfront cost and there are ongoing costs for surveillance and immune suppression, but it is much less expensive in the long term and frees up the individuals who receive the transplant.

What are the barriers? Well, our transplant teams in Alberta are underfunded and overburdened. They cannot increase the number of transplant patients that they look after without reducing what they can do for any one individual. Therefore, we need to invest in more staff for pre- and posttransplant care. These same limited staff are also involved in trying to support potential donors through the donor assessment process, and we really need more time for them to be able to do that because donors are changing their mind. It takes such a very long time to get a transplant.

To manage the people waiting for these transplants, other resources are needed, including lab resources. Alberta is only resourced to evaluate one donor at a time, and each assessment takes many months, almost a year. One after another of potential donors can be assessed. We need to be doing them concurrently, as economic analysis has shown that this is worth while because we then avoid the costs of dialysis.

Another limit is hospital and staff capacity. I'm sure we all remember the fiasco in December 2023 when a parent under anaesthetic came out of anaesthetic without giving up her kidney because there was no ICU capacity for her child. Heroic measures by physicians and staff made that happen in the long run, but we're no better at this time. Hospital capacity is critical. Stable staffing is needed. Private surgical centres are, as predicted and as always happens, taking needed resources from public hospitals. The waitlists are growing for kidney surgery, for transplant surgery, and there are often cancellations at the very last minute for the patients and the donors.

From the perspective of care for people with transplants we need co-ordinators, we need more funding of the team, and we need to expand the resources so we can make this happen more thoroughly in Alberta. This will save us money in the long run. We need to increase the surgical capacity in our publicly funded hospitals, and I ask the minister to speak to the leaders of these programs and support their needs. Listen to the patient advocates, who also know what is needed.

Now that we know that I can be heard, I have some other ideas that I've put forward, that I'd like an update on. But at this point, in conclusion, I ask all of you to register online at the Alberta organ and tissue donation registry to be an organ donor. Tell your family members that you are a donor.

I move to hear from the minister on this bill.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any others wishing to speak? The Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for bringing this forward. I hate to break her bubble, but unfortunately for this bill, we have actually been working on this for quite a long time, almost a whole year. The reason we made it public last week was because we had gone past the 2024 tax year. We didn't want to create confusion. We were actually going to announce it sooner, but because of the 2024 tax year and knowing, having worked with the Canada Revenue Agency quite closely, that we could not be ready for 2024, that we could in fact be ready for 2025, we made sure to announce it after the tax season had started.

Mr. Speaker, it is very important. It is the reason why we have given more prominence to Give Life Alberta in the province. We have actually now removed it from the oversight of Alberta Health Services. It will be under Acute Care Alberta because it does deserve its own prominence. We need to make sure that people are aware of the ability to provide their organs and tissue donations. We are going to work very closely with Give Life Alberta and all of the providers across the province.

Again, this bill, while very laudable because it does do all of those things that the member opposite was saying, is unnecessary because it is redundant. We've already put this into action. We're looking forward to making even more improvements with organ transplant and tissue donation across the province.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I would ask all the members – although, as the member opposite has said, there's a lot of value to it, we're already doing it, so there is no need for this bill. We've already done it, are doing it, have done it, and we'll continue to make sure that organ donation and tissue transplantation gets the prominence that it needs across this province. Again, I would ask my fellow members to vote down this bill because it's redundant, and we don't need redundant bills in this Legislature.

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

Seeing none, I will give the opportunity for Calgary-Varsity to close debate.

Dr. Metz: I thank you for moving forward on the recommendations of this bill. It is a small but important step in building a robust organ transplant program in Alberta. The program does need to be supported, not starved of the much-needed funds, to expedite organ transplants and safely support patients.

I will continue to bring forward other ideas. I would like to ask that transparency might be a very useful measure that could come forward and that might be a learning from this bill because the advocacy groups wanting this bill were completely unaware that anything was going on behind the scenes.

I have other things that I have suggested, and I'm wondering if the minister would consider being transparent about what is happening there. We know that we need to implement mental health supports for paramedics. They don't know of anything going on there. It would be very nice to be transparent if that also is moving forward. To develop a training program for radiation therapists to become advanced practice radiation therapists: this has been

discussed, but there's no knowledge at many levels I've spoken to, all areas. Nobody is aware that this is actually moving forward, so it would be nice that people could stop their advocacy efforts and work on concrete plans if the ministry would be open about things that are happening.

With this, I move to close debate on this bill.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion for second reading of Bill 212 lost]

The Acting Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request the unanimous consent of the Assembly to waive Standing Order 8(1), call it 5 o'clock, and proceed immediately to consideration of Motion Other than Government Motion 524.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Public-sector Wages

524. Ms Wright moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly

- (a) recognize that wages for teachers, registered nurses, educational assistants, and other public-sector workers have not kept pace with the rapid increase in the cost of living over the last four years, and
- (b) urge the government to consider cost-of-living increases when bargaining with public-sector workers for future compensation agreements to ensure that these workers are fairly compensated.

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a motion that I think is reasonable and really, really clear in its intent. It has, in fact, two things that we are asking the government to do. The first part is that we're simply asking that the UCP government recognize that wages for teachers and registered nurses and educational assistants and other public-sector workers have simply not kept pace with the rapid increase of the cost of living over the last four years and, further, coming out of that then, to urge this government to consider cost-of-living increases when in the midst of bargaining, as we know the government is in right now, to make sure, in fact, that workers are fairly and justly compensated.

3:10

Mr. Speaker, we know that wages over the last number of years have not kept up with inflation, and this is something that has caused a great deal of hardship, difficulty, and challenge for far too many folks in Alberta. This government, sadly, which has of course been elected to serve all Albertans, unfortunately, does not seem inclined to make the changes necessary that would provide even a small measure of relief. That really is the reason for this motion.

Here in Alberta we see the impacts of that lack of action. During every single instance of bargaining that has occurred over the last year or two and, in fact, that is occurring right now, workers have asked that the government hear and respond to their experiences, what it is like to work in Alberta right now after years of inflation, price gouging, an affordability crisis that doesn't seem to be going

anywhere. There is reasonableness in what it is they're asking for. They're asking to be treated with respect, and they're asking to be treated fairly.

These folks have experienced a very real decline in the power of their wages. They've endured – we all have, Mr. Speaker – double-digit inflation over the years, and all of this has resulted in a decline in their purchasing power. This is through all sectors, through all manner of work. Today's motion, again, is about how this UCP government should be simply accounting for and planning for something that is a reasonable thing to be accounting for when they are considering what public-sector bargaining will look like coming up.

They should be thinking about offering those folks who work on all of our collective behalf in so many areas – nurses, teachers, educational support workers, cooks, conservation officers, social workers, skilled trades, wildland firefighters, care workers, and health care workers – because all of these folks, who are doing some really tough work on our collective behalf, deserve to have a life where they can thrive. They deserve to have a paycheque that fairly compensates them for the labour that they offer us. Unfortunately, we're in the middle of a UCP government that continually, it seems to me, refuses to listen and to respond in a respectful manner, which I believe is one of the reasons why we're in the impasse that we are in where bargaining is concerned.

We know that inflation and cost of living are a thing. We look at how much our rent is going to be increased. We go to the grocery store. We go to renew a mortgage. We go to perhaps look yet again at buying another beater rather than a more recent model car. We know how hard it is to make ends meet these days. That basket of goods and services that's used to calculate inflation actually typically includes many of those things: food, shelter, furniture, clothing, transportation. Using that basket of food, the Bank of Canada on our behalf will calculate and tell us that between 2015 and 2025 the overall inflation rate that we have all experienced is just under 30 per cent. It sits at about 29 per cent. That is an astonishing number. Quite frankly, it rivals the 1980s, Mr. Speaker.

Between 1915 – now I'm really dating myself. Between 2015 and 2019 inflation increased by an average of 1.75 per year, but between 2019 and '25 inflation rose 20 per cent over just that relatively small six-year period, which accounted for an average inflation rate of around 3.19 per cent. This should of course be otherwise thought of and known as a decline in the value of money. It means that although we might have \$100 to spend, that \$100 is simply not worth as much as it used to be worth.

That has real impacts, Mr. Speaker, in terms of people's general standard of living. When one considers that we're all in the midst of this massive affordability crisis that stretches through everything we do and everything we need and while this year's inflation rate may indeed look like it's stabilizing for a bit and that, of course, provides some relief, that 29 per cent over the last decade is an awful lot to bear for all of us. It's an awful lot to bear for those everyday Albertans, those public-sector workers who do that work every day to keep all the government buildings open, to keep the schools open. They teach our children. They take care of us when we go to hospital. These are important folks, and they deserve to be fairly compensated. Adding this sort of adjustment when considering bargaining is the right thing and important to do.

Stats Canada came up in a report that was released in June '24, and it noted that as inflation rose sharply beginning in 2021, the actual value of hourly wages, real wages declined for many people in Canada. We know, of course, that the pandemic did a number on everyone's paycheques and everyone's expenses, but the pandemic isn't the only thing at force here. Between 2020 and 2022 the median hourly real wage in Canada fell by nearly 5 per cent.

Those same statistics, Mr. Speaker, also tell us that Alberta along with Saskatchewan are the only provinces where real wages decreased over the last decade. In fact, since 2019 Albertans' real hourly wages have dropped by 4.5 per cent. To put it another way, in 2023 half the workers in Alberta made \$30 an hour or less, and when you account for inflation, the analysis tells us that this was about \$1.74 per hour, or 5.5 per cent, less than 10 years ago.

Regardless of what the government tells us – and I know they tell us this a lot – the truth of the Alberta advantage: in every single month other provinces, Mr. Speaker, are slowly but surely catching up to us. That advantage is very quickly becoming a distinct disadvantage, particularly when you set it against the very real experiences that folks are going through right now and particularly when you remember that inflation doesn't always impact everybody equally. As one researcher stated: at any moment of inflation of precarity it is always those who have less who pay the highest price.

This government has had a number of opportunities recently to show they support the very hard work that these workers, these Albertans do. They had an opportunity to support the protecting workers' tips act. They had an opportunity to acknowledge and respond to class sizes. They've had an opportunity to in fact change their bargaining stance, to propose salary increases for all public-sector workers that reflect the previous year's worth of inflation. Except they didn't do any of that, Mr. Speaker. This motion is one small opportunity toward this government doing the right thing. It's important to acknowledge that wages for public-sector workers – wages for all workers but in this case for public-sector workers – simply haven't kept pace with the rapid increase in that cost of living.

All that a COLA clause, a cost-of-living adjustment clause, is is simply a piece of language in a collective agreement which just asks and requires that the rate of inflation is taken into account when wages are set. The clause's provisions can look different because contracts are different, Mr. Speaker. It can link a percentage wage increase to a percentage inflation increase, or it can link a dollars and cents amount to a change in the inflation index, or it can do a combination of the two. It can allow for increases in wages at specified intervals during the length of a contract. Some clauses only come into effect, in other words they're triggered, once inflation hits a certain level. In other circumstances they're always in effect and always taken into consideration.

What these clauses do, though, Mr. Speaker – and this is the most important part here – is they provide a short-term salve against temporary increase in the cost of living because they guarantee for those workers that wages will keep pace with expenses. In other words, earnings keep pace with inflation, which has a positive impact upon the purchasing power of each of those workers. They also provide assurances that future inflation will be accounted for the moment it occurs, as it happens, rather than a decade later. All of this means that employees and employers don't have to scramble. Unfortunately, the scrambling is what we've been in the middle of dealing with over the last couple of years.

When governments consider a COLA as a portion of what it is they're doing in their bargaining with public-sector workers, Mr. Speaker, it ends up not just being about the wage itself; it ends up being about so much more. Employers, like the government of Alberta right now, like this UCP government, can provide some small sense of security that folks and workers can count on, particularly when dealing with uncertainty that none of us have any control over like a sudden increase in inflation, perhaps owing to the effect that tariffs might have on our economy through so very many sectors.

Cost-of-living agreements do not replace regular wage increases. They sort of walk alongside those increases, but their consideration is important and meaningful. They ensure that workers know that in current and future bargaining sessions they'll be treated fairly and respectfully.

The Acting Speaker: I would ask the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to move Motion 524.

Ms Wright: I move Motion 524.

3:20

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to the motion. I was hoping that maybe the Minister of Finance would be willing to speak to the motion first, but I'm happy to stand and take his spot so we can continue on with the importance of negotiations and working with our public sector, something that is under the purview of the Minister of Finance, and the importance of COLA.

Before I get into the importance of today and why COLA is so important today, I do want to maybe go down a little bit of a history lesson with the government around the good old Klein days, which I'm sure . . . [interjections] I was expecting that response. I would say that, you know, there are folk that look back on Premier Klein's leadership and there are a lot of fond memories, I'm sure, for the Conservatives around what his leadership looked like and some of the things that he did while he was Premier. I would like to remind the government opposite that when we ran in 2015, Premier Klein's daughter endorsed our party and not the Conservative Party because there were some concerns about the shift of the conservative movement in the day and moving away from the values of Klein.

What I will say, though, is that there are things that the Conservative government should learn from when Premier Klein was Premier. When he first took over as the leader of the Progressive Conservatives – he was elected in 1995; he served a very long time as Premier, actually – during his first couple of years he had some very big bumps along the road, very quick learning experiences that I would think the government would want to consider as they move forward with their agenda. As we know, the Klein government very quickly came in. That was a time where inflation was significantly higher. The province was trying to bring down their deficits and address and balance the budget, as Premier Klein said. How was he going to do that?

Well, his way of balancing the budget was to go after the public sector. He chose at that time to start slashing the public service. I'll just give you some numbers. Cutting wages and benefits for workers: in 1994 the budget delivered a 20 per cent cut in health care, a 21 per cent cut in postsecondary education, a 12.4 per cent cut in K to 12 education, and Alberta Works, called welfare back then, was cut in half over one year. Within two years Alberta program spending declined over 21 per cent and homelessness climbed 740 per cent. There are some themes here. I wouldn't say the numbers are as extreme, necessarily. I'm sure my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood could maybe give me the homelessness numbers as of today, but they're still quite high.

What we were seeing at that time was a significant cut in public service – wages were being cut, job losses, layoffs, attrition: all of the things – and a lot of privatization and conversations around privatization. What happened was that on November 14 Premier Klein decided to announce a privatization of laundry services with

the Calgary hospitals. Part of that was his step towards increasing the privatization of health care. I would say that at that time labour was already pretty irritated with the fact that there weren't a lot of negotiations happening around their wages and there weren't a lot of conversations around the direction of where the province was headed with service delivery. They were feeling the pressure, as they are today, of trying to provide services with even less and less and less support from the government.

As I'm sure everybody in this House knows, what happened was the laundry workers, who were members of CUPE at that time, similar to our educational assistants that we just recently saw go on a strike due to the fact that they weren't being able to do appropriate bargaining, decided to walk. They did some job action. Some of them called in sick; some decided to just not show up. Anyway, what happened was the beginning of a movement in Alberta's history.

What we saw was the rest of the government sector – and a couple of members, I believe, in our caucus were probably there at that time. It created a wildcat strike. Hospitals shut down. Teachers didn't show up. Like, everybody just decided that at that point they'd had enough and they weren't going to put up with it anymore. What I would say is that when that strike happened, the Klein government . . .

An Hon. Member: They broke the law.

Ms Sweet: They broke the law. That's what you took from learning. I love how that's what the government took from this: they broke the law. Not about the fact that maybe, just maybe, workers at some point – this is a history lesson, and there is a learning here. The history lesson to the whole thing is that you can't treat workers one way – not pay them what they deserve to get paid, not do fair negotiation, not do fair bargaining, continue to offer them zeros, and expect that at some point they're not going to say: enough is enough – and expect them to continue to show up.

Klein figured it out pretty fast. The wildcat happened, and very quickly he pivoted. He moved away from his privatization agenda and the slashing of services and decided it probably wasn't the best direction for him to go. Government, you're in that moment right now. I'm just trying to give you some advice. You can learn from Klein. Since people like to continue to quote him on the government side, take some advice and realize that you have public-sector workers who are currently in the motions of doing strike votes. They've had enough. They've done it before, and they're not scared to do it again, so maybe go back to the table and have a conversation.

Doing a motion to the labour board for a lockout does not encourage a mutually respectful conversation. It just basically is, like: "You strike; we lock out. Oh, my goodness, here we go." And then you're at an impasse. But what happens when you hit that impasse is that Albertans suffer, right? It shuts down hospitals. It shuts down classrooms. Essential services become a problem: remand centres like prisons, emergency services like paramedics, the current building we're standing in. There are places that will be impacted if the government decides not to come back to the table.

Let's talk about the fact that this is also something where it exists in other places. COLA, cost-of-living adjustment, exists with the public service pension plan. It exists within the LAPP. It exists in the special services pension plan. All of those pension plans already have COLA built in to what public-sector service workers receive when they retire. The irony of this is that we're already going to see, through the public service pension plans, the LAPP, or the special services pension, an adjustment to COLA this year. So the retired folk are going to get it, but if you're still working, you don't

qualify for COLA currently as being negotiated or discussed or existing within the legislation.

It's built in as part of the pension legislation that COLA is provided, and that's to protect pensioners. That's to recognize that without COLA their dollar erodes and they don't have as much to spend. In fact, pensioners tend to be the folks that are driving some of the economy when it comes to travel and doing all of those other things. The rationale I guess would be that, if we're looking at this motion, the government should vote in favour of it, one, to show goodwill but also just to align yourself with all the other pension plans, like everybody else gets.

3:30

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Any other members wishing to speak to Motion 524? The Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to begin by thanking the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview for using this opportunity to give us a chance to vote and to consider Motion Other than Government Motion 524 and the importance of having a living wage for those who we entrust with taking care of important public-sector initiatives on behalf of us all. It does specifically name some professions, but I do want to take a moment to just reflect on how many public-sector workers are at work right now in this building and in so many other government buildings on our behalf, making sure that we are in safe, clean work environments, that we are able to do our jobs with focus and commitment. That's what they ask for in return, too. I'm thinking about all of the people who are literally emptying our wastebaskets under these desks at the end of the day and how many of them are really struggling right now to be able to put food on the table and pay their rent.

There are a number of workers, now that the government has given notice around potential lockout initiatives, that are getting ready for what the strike or the lockout will look like. Folks pool their resources when they're part of a union, and those resources are used to pay out strike pay on an even basis, so even if some people make more money than others, when you're on strike, everyone makes the same. There are a lot of public-sector workers, including those who work in this building, who will make more when they are on strike than they do right now as employees of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. That is shameful; \$700 a week is not a large salary, Mr. Speaker.

I know that the government members know this. They voted to give themselves a cost-of-living increase, for those who live outside of the capital region, to pay for their rents. They know that the cost of living is going up. They wanted to have more to be able to maintain the quality of life that they had here as their secondary residence, and they thought it was important to put in a cost-of-living increase for themselves, for UCP members who have to travel to the capital for their business. That cost-of-living increase is more than what most folks who are living on public assistance right now make; for example, those who are living on AISH. The government is given more for their secondary housing allowance. They also get per diems. They also get travel money; they get to expense transportation. Well, if you're on AISH, you don't have other outside income and the ability to expense your travel, to expense your meals, and to say that you want a higher cost-of-living increase for your housing allowance.

I really do also want to take the next few minutes to just tell a story. In debate I'm sure we'll talk more about it. We were actually leaders in addressing the affordability crisis in this province when we hit \$15 dollars an hour for the minimum wage in this province. We were the first in North America to get there, I believe, or the

first to commit to getting there. We did phase it in over four years to give people an opportunity to adjust to the costs, especially for business operators. We didn't have a two-tiered minimum wage. If you did an entry-level job, you got paid the same, whether you were 17 or 18; it didn't matter.

I remember visiting a classroom. I'm sure all members of this Assembly go and visit schools on the regular. I remember this one grade 6 student, because we were talking about the minimum wage and how it had gone up, and they asked, "Is there a maximum wage?" Of course, we had a good chuckle. Then they asked, "Is there a maximum number of jobs?" And I said, "Oh, we want as many jobs as possible; jobs are really good for the economy." He said: "No. Is there a maximum number of jobs my mom is allowed to work?" She was working three jobs. A single mom, three jobs to be able to afford to pay her rent, put food on the table, and, hopefully, be able to throw a birthday party for her kids.

What has happened since that time is so much worse in terms of the affordability crisis than it was even then. What has happened is that we have for six years seen either a freeze or a rollback to the minimum wage, and at that same time we've seen the largest inflationary pressures that I can recall, because I was very young, Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, in the 1980s, the biggest inflationary pressures we've seen since then and maybe even bigger than we saw during that time.

This is really about ensuring fair compensation so that people can keep up with the cost of living. This isn't about extravagance. This is about being able to meet your basic needs and have a little bit extra so that your kid doesn't need to go to school worrying about if you're going to end up having to take another job and if you're not going to be able to be there to tuck them into bed at night. This is about making sure that everyone can afford to have a good life. I do regularly hear members from both sides talk about Alberta being the best place to live, work, raise a family, vacation, you know, start a business. All of those things, I want them to be true for everyone, not just for some, and people that we put into the public service deserve to have a good quality of life for them and those they love.

A living wage right now in both Calgary and Edmonton is far from the minimum wage of \$15. A living wage in Edmonton now is \$22.25, and in Calgary it's \$23.70. Those are significantly higher than what we are paying people. I know that the thrust of this is around those who are working in the public sector, and it is incredibly important that everyone in the public sector be able to see themselves on a career path when they start here. I don't want people to work here thinking: oh, I'm just here to cut my teeth and then get out and go make way more money somewhere else. That is possible, but if people can at least have a dignified life and a reasonable income, they should be able to see themselves staying in the public service and working here long term until they can afford to retire one day.

Speaking of retiring one day, there are many people who work in these jobs that are far beyond the age of 65. When you leave here today, colleagues, through you, Mr. Speaker, think about all the people downstairs who are wearing the really lovely Alberta Branded T-shirts or collared shirts. If you stop and ask some of them how their day is going, maybe even their age if it comes up in natural conversation, you will be shocked how many people are over 75 who are still working in this building, how many people are over 75 and are working two jobs.

I know that during the EA strike, when people who had children with disabilities were told that they couldn't safely send their children to school – how wrong that the government was nickel and diming these EAs so that they had to go on strike so that the kids that they were supporting were told that they weren't welcome in school, and that meant that the parents of those kids had to also take

time off from their jobs to stay home and care for their children because their children couldn't be safe at school. When the government makes these decisions that force workers onto the streets, it has mega impacts throughout our organizations and throughout our communities.

I bring this up because I know somebody who works in one of these public-sector jobs who told me that they were still working because their kid had to stay home with their grandkid, who was told that they couldn't go to school because it wasn't safe for them. Everyone should be able to be on a career path that brings them dignity, that ensures that they can pay their bills at the end of the day and have a little bit extra for those nice things, and that they can see themselves contributing to the best of their skills in the best way possible for their fulfillment and the fulfillment of our province.

I am also reminded, Mr. Speaker, of our leader, Naheed Nenshi, who regularly talks about when he was in Fort McMurray visiting with workers on the line there. There was a worker who talked about how she didn't stumble into the profession of being an educational assistant. It was a chosen profession. She went to school for it. She worked really hard. She was proud to be employed by the same division for over 20 years, and in that time I think her increase was a few bucks, five bucks maybe, over a 20-year period. That is not okay with the inflationary pressures that we are facing in the province of Alberta.

I will say the other half of that is to do something to stop inflation, to do something to help control those pressures. The government could bring in rent increase caps, because that's the number one reason why people are working multiple jobs right now. Certain landlords are increasing their rates at awful rates that either push people onto the streets or push them to working additional jobs. They could cap electricity rates and utility rates. They could take many, many small measures that would make a big difference in people's lives. Today they have the opportunity to take a measure to vote on this motion, and I want to thank my colleague for bringing it forward.

3:40

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Any others wishing to speak? I will recognize the Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to thank my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview for bringing forward this motion. It's a very important one, and as my colleagues previous to me have explained already, it's a very significant, important motion that, you know, the government consider the cost-of-living increases when they're bargaining with public service.

We know that even in this year's budget the government itself and their own figures say that the consumer price index is increasing by 5.1 per cent. That's a significant increase. If workers do not get cost-of-living adjustment themselves, then, of course, they have less power to purchase and to buy the necessities of life.

We know that we have some of the highest grocery prices in the country. High car insurance. I mean, the UCP took the cap off and now the insurance industry is bringing in significant profits, billions and billions of dollars. Same with the utilities. They're the highest in the country. Housing. You know, it may not be the highest in the country, but that's still a very significant increase, and despite the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services saying that we have this great situation in housing, he's always not referring to affordable housing; he's just referring to housing in general, so he's missing the point. We're talking about affordable housing, and that housing is out of the reach of so many. They have to live in

overcrowded settings, substandard housing, put up with a lot of things because they don't have that choice, and that's a lot to do with not being able to have the income.

Of course, you know, people who are hired as public servants do an important service for us in Alberta, and they should be remunerated at a fair and in a just way. Unfortunately, sometimes this is not happening. We know that since the UCP became government back in 2019, real wages have dropped overall by 4.5 per cent under their watch. So all Albertans, regardless of being public servants or not, are experiencing less buying power because their wages are not keeping up with inflation. It's very important that the government see that public servants should be supported with this cost-of-living increase. When they are involved in negotiations, which they are now, of course, with many public servants – we know that there are teachers, registered nurses, registered social workers, educational assistants, and many other public servants – whose contracts are up for negotiation right now, the government should seriously consider making sure that this is a fundamental part of the negotiations that they offer to workers in Alberta.

You know, I was a public servant for some years. I worked as a caseworker and also a supervisor in child welfare. It was a bit later than the Klein era but not much later, and under his watch, as the Member for Edmonton-Manning talked about, there was a lot of attack on the public service, and that seems to be what this government is doing, too: not valuing public service work, attacking what they're doing. Certainly, every chance they get, they condemn unions, and that makes no sense at all because we know that unions lift all boats, not only those who are unionized but all workers to make sure that it's fair.

We know that income inequality in Alberta is the highest of any province in Canada, so that's important for workers to be able to have the incomes and that their employers pay them a fair wage and that their wages have an automatic cost-of-living adjustment, I think on an annual basis is what's very important.

Anyway, I was just saying that when I worked in child welfare, you know, I'm so sad to say that I think that not much has improved in that area in terms of lack of resources. Oftentimes it was all about closing files instead of supporting vulnerable Albertans, and that was always so disturbing to me. Frankly, I after a while could not ethically work in child welfare anymore because I felt like that was the focus of the Conservative government at that time, just to close files and really invest as little resources as possible. Certainly, the workers were not respected. They were given hardly any resources to work with, and I mean, we're dealing with serious, serious issues with vulnerable people. At times children's lives are at stake.

If anything, that should be an area that's well funded and that professionals, registered social workers are hired in. But you know what? They can't keep registered social workers because registered social workers do have choices. I know that the minister himself currently has talked to different universities and is sort of saying: oh, there's something that you're doing wrong with the education of social workers because they never stay working for us very long; they quit and get jobs elsewhere. He was sort of blaming the institutions that educate them, but, hey, that's not the issue. The issue is to look right there in your own department.

Why are social workers leaving? Because there are not enough resources. There are huge caseloads. There are very serious issues at hand with very little support, and people are not supported to do the work. I worked there for I think about three and a half years, and then I just felt I couldn't follow my code of ethics and work for the government. Certainly, I didn't get paid very much for that work, and they didn't – you know, I had a higher level degree. I had a master's degree. None of that was respected. If anything, I was condemned because I had a master's degree.

Hey, why don't we actually support our public servants? Certainly, this motion would go a long way to doing that because it would recognize that – you know, I was a single mom at the time. A lot of public servants are single moms, are supporting their families alone, and they need to pay for groceries. They need to pay for housing. They need to pay for insurance, all of those things. So if the government wants to have a stable workforce that supports vulnerable Albertans and really cares about our province, then this would be a motion that they would support.

Of course, you know, because I have my own experience as a social worker working in child welfare, I speak about that. But, I mean, I know the amazing work of registered social workers.

Having been a cancer survivor – back in 2018 I was in the University of Alberta hospital for 60 days with leukemia, and that experience showed me what a significant resource and what hard work registered nurses did in that area. This isn't just cavalier, that sort of they do whatever. They're highly skilled, highly trained. I mean, I had a lot of time because I had 60 days, and I wasn't feeling that great, of course. I just could see the professionalism of the nurses. It wasn't just one nurse that was great; it was all of them. That didn't happen by chance. That happened because they had devoted themselves to their profession. They followed their code of ethics, standards of practice. They kept themselves current with continuing competence, all of those things, and that made them all have a very high standard of care, which basically saved my life. I know so many other Albertans have that experience, too.

This is something that the government could show these workers, the significance of the work they do, by having a cost-of-living adjustment sort of automatically on an annual basis put into their agreements with those workers.

Besides that, we know that teachers also are working so hard in overcrowded classrooms with very complex kids. [Ms Sigurdson's speaking time expired] Okay.

Thank you.

3:50

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

I'll recognize the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to the motion from the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, Motion 524. We've been in this latest round of bargaining for over a year now, and we've been working hard to reach agreements with all of the unions that are part of our public sector, and it hasn't been easy. We've had two tentative agreements rejected, first by the nurses and last week by the teachers.

One thing I will give the members opposite credit for – I'll be charitable here and say that it's one of the few good things that they did while in government – is the creation of the public bargaining co-ordination office, the PBCO. It lets us look at this from a whole-of-government approach.

We operate not on rhetoric or feelings but base our bargaining strategies on the market data. Well, what does the data say? It says that in most cases, coming out of COVID, we were below market, so we are making offers that bring wages up to the market. The general wage increase ratified in that agreement was 12 per cent, or 3 per cent a year for four years. That's the same offer we made to teachers and to AUPE staff with targeted market adjustments. Sheriffs and correctional workers, for example, were found to be further below market, so the offer made in their case is 24 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, these are substantial increases. The average private-sector salary increase in that time was 2 per cent. We believe in fair compensation, in ensuring that we can compete for talent with the

rest of Canada, but also in ensuring that there is just remuneration for the work that is done. Everyone in this Chamber respects the work that nurses and teachers do, the work that our entire public service does, and that is why these agreements have been offered. It is also critical to point out that the salary adjustments are only a portion of the labour agreements.

Part of the nursing deal is to ensure that there is funding to improve our health care system and attract talent to rural and remote areas. I'm a rural MLA, and I don't need to tell my rural colleagues that attracting nurses to rural Alberta is a struggle. With the contract that was ratified, we will see more nurses in the areas with shortages, and my colleague the Minister of Health will be hiring 1,000 nursing grads a year to ensure that the system is fully staffed.

The agreement with the ATA is similar. In addition to the salary increases, we also offered \$405 million in supports in the classroom. It would have made progress on the issues of classroom complexity, of class sizes. It would have taken the Education budget from \$10 billion this year to nearly \$12 billion in 2027. It is my hope that in the coming months we can reach an agreement that is best for teachers, students, and families.

The members opposite want us to do something that goes against the labour market. They want us to go against the data. The numbers don't lie. This is the data. Here's some other data. This year the budget has a \$5.2 billion deficit without a path to balance. Oil prices are depressed and volatile, and the global economy is in turmoil unlike almost any other time in our lifetimes. Fair compensation and addressing the challenges of population growth in our health and education systems is the focus and the theme of Budget 2025, but the province has to make offers that we can afford. Albertans understand that. I think that when we see demands from some groups for 30 per cent wage increases, it is not only insulting to Albertans but also shows a dramatic lack of understanding of the government's fiscal position.

Now, before I ask all members to oppose this motion for reasons I just outlined, I just wanted to make a quick comment regarding some of the comments made by the members opposite that this government disrespects the public service. I would say: look at the facts. We offered a deal that was ratified with the United Nurses that, by their own accounts, makes them the highest paid nurses in Canada. We did that at a time when we're in a deficit position with great uncertainty and no path to balance, which legislatively we were obligated to create in the next three years. We still did that because we think it's the right thing to do.

We use data largely from the Ontario west jurisdictions because we want to ensure that we fix and address some of our recruitment and retention challenges. We want to be fully staffed. We know how important these services are. In light of all of that, I think it's unfair to make comments like that.

I think the history lesson that was provided by the members opposite on what's happened in Alberta in the past – look at the facts of what's happening today. We're in a deficit position. We have a strong desire to show a path to balance, and we're still doing this because we think it's the right thing to do. We'll continue to bargain in good faith, and we'll take what comes. We're going to make fair offers to the public service because we know how important they are. In light of all of that, I would ask all members of the House to oppose this motion.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

Member Boparai: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in strong support of the personal member's Motion 524, which calls on the government of Alberta to urgently address the growing cost-of-living crisis that is directly affecting the lives of teachers, registered nurses, educational assistants, and many other public-sector workers. This motion calls for the government to consider the cost-of-living increases during future public-sector contract negotiations to ensure that these dedicated workers receive fair compensation for their hard work.

The rapidly rising cost of living over the past four years has not yet been matched by wage increases, which leaves thousands of hard-working Albertans struggling to make ends meet. Public-sector workers are vital to the health of our communities. They work long hours to support our education system, health care services, and critical social programs. Yet despite their tireless contributions, many find themselves unable to keep up with basic living expenses like housing, groceries, and utilities. This is a problem that cannot be ignored any longer. This is something that every worker in this province, both public and private, deserves, and today I stand here to advocate on behalf of those workers who are the backbone of our communities and who have been neglected for far too long.

First, I would like to go into some background on this issue. Over the past few years Alberta has seen an unprecedented rise in cost of living. Housing costs are climbing, utility prices rising, and grocery bills are higher than ever before. For many Albertans the financial pressure has become unbearable, but for the workers who serve in our schools, hospitals, and care facilities, the pressure is particularly acute. Wages for public-sector workers have stagnated, especially when compared to the rapidly increasing cost of living. In fact, Alberta's real hourly wages have dropped by 4.5 per cent since 2019. This is the worst decline of any province in Canada. It's no secret that Alberta's economy is undergoing significant changes, yet public-sector workers are being asked to do more with less. They are asked to take a greater workload, navigate bureaucratic challenges, and provide essential services, all while their wages are not keeping up with the costs that are climbing faster than ever.

Why do we support this motion? The Official Opposition fully supports this motion as it addresses the fundamental issue of fair compensation for public-sector workers. Unfortunately, under the current UCP government we have seen a disturbing trend, an erosion of public trust in the very systems that Albertans rely on. Whether it's health care, education, or social services, we are seeing the impact of poor decisions and neglect by this government. The failure to ensure fair wages for those who work within this system is just one example of how the UCP has failed to prioritize working families in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, public-sector workers have been pushed to the brink, with many of them having to work multiple jobs just to make ends meet. In fact, surveys suggest that many full-time workers are taking additional part-time jobs simply to afford basic living expenses, an indicator of how difficult it has become to thrive, not just survive, in this province.

Let's look at this government's record. Since 2019 Alberta's real hourly wages have dropped by 4.5 per cent, and the UCP has not increased the minimum wage for over six years. As a result, Alberta's wage advantage, the very thing that made Alberta a leader in wages across Canada, has shrunk significantly.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, what is our proposed solution? Private member's Motion 524. This motion is a crucial step forward in addressing the needs of public-sector workers. By calling for cost-of-living adjustments to be included in future public-sector contracts, we are

ensuring that these workers are no longer left behind by rising costs. We must reassure the Alberta advantage not by cutting public services but by ensuring that working Albertans have wages that keep up with the cost of living. By implementing this, we provide stable and predictable wage increases for public-sector workers, helping them plan for the future while maintaining their purchasing power.

This is not just about fair wages. It is about protecting the people who protect us. Teachers, nurses, and other public-sector workers are not just employees. They are the foundation of our communities. They deserve to be recognized, respected, and compensated fairly for their contributions.

In conclusion, private member's Motion 524 is not just about wages. It's about restoring fairness, and it's time to stand with them. We, the Official Opposition, fully support this motion because we understand that Albertans deserve a government that works for them. Albertans deserve better, and we can do better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Currie.

Member Eremenko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll keep my comments brief. You know, there are so many Albertans doing the right thing. They are working hard, they're paying the bills, they're following the rules, they're paying taxes, they're providing for their families, they're saving for university for the kids, and it's no wonder that people are growing very angry and disillusioned with working so hard and doing everything right and not getting ahead.

We've repeatedly seen Conservative governments who choose to kind of exploit that frustration and exhaust that, you know, kind of exasperate that frustration rather than actually addressing the problem. Since 2019 the fact of the matter is that Alberta's real hourly wages have dropped by 4 and a half per cent. It's the worst decline of any province.

Mr. Speaker, my parents were two public school teachers, and they had four kids. They could still build a home down in Woodbine, which in Calgary was just about at the southern edge of the city back in the day. On two teachers' salaries they could support a family, save for postsecondary, have a little bit of discretionary income, you know, sign up my brother for baseball, send me to summer camp. The possibility of that now is unthinkable.

Wages have steadily ticked up in the private sector for years because, especially in Calgary, there's this resounding argument that: well, you know, wages have to keep up because this is a highly competitive white-collar environment. Indeed, it was assumed that that's just a cost of doing business. But here's the thing. While Calgary grew through its booms and kind of fretted through its busts, the public sector got left further and further behind. It has created what I think is an incredibly unfortunate kind of two-tier system of worker.

Public-sector employees, Mr. Speaker, still pay taxes. They buy homes. They have mortgages. They start businesses. They spend discretionary income. They go to hockey games and restaurants and send their kids to university. They are a critical piece of a thriving economy as much as the private sector is, but we talk about these two professions, these two industries, these two sectors as though one is more deserving than another to be able to make their ends meet.

A cost-of-living allowance would require an adjustment in workers' wages based on changes to CPI. This motion is a small opportunity to recognize the effort, to recognize the contribution of public-sector employees and to stop with the zero-sum game that pits private versus public. We don't have to do that, Mr. Speaker.

We can recognize the value of public-sector employees and pay them what they are worth.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak?

I will give the floor to Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to close debate.

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will say once again, as I started my remarks saying it, that this is a motion that simply asks for a couple of really reasonable things on the part of this government. We're asking for this government to, first of all, acknowledge that wages haven't kept up with inflation. I'm flummoxed as to why they won't acknowledge even that. Beyond that, of course, it urges the government to consider that cost-of-living increases be thought of when engaging in bargaining; again, a reasonable thing to ask.

We know that when cost-of-living agreements are included, that idea of fair compensation, that means that salaries are protected from losing value during inflation. This ensures that purchasing power isn't diminished year over year. This is important, Mr. Speaker, particularly in the midst of an affordability crisis like we're in the middle of. We know that it can provide some measure of financial security, not just for workers but also for their employers, who then indeed can plan for these sorts of things. There's stability. There's predictability.

We also know – and previous colleagues have talked about this as well – it would of course engender a more positive view of working in the public sector. There would probably, I would imagine, be an increase in not only just retention of workers but also perhaps folks who actually want to work in the public service. That, too, is important. It would encourage folks to stay in their jobs longer. It would increase the conditions of work, which, of course, we know is important through all sectors, Mr. Speaker. You would end up with some longer serving folks perhaps who could act as mentors to those.

When we're in the middle of all the things that we are in the middle of and when you know that we're no longer the highest wage province in the country, when you know that since 2019 real hourly wages have fallen by 4.5 per cent, when you know that we have the lowest minimum wage in all of Canada, when you know that there's a deliberateness in applying the wage mandates in every single bargaining round that we've seen, it does indeed, contrary to what the Minister of Finance told us, show a lack of respect towards these workers, these workers who indeed help us to manage all of the different workings of government. More than that; we're a province of the weakest wage growth, the biggest decline in real earnings, and these wage suppressing policies.

It's also, Mr. Speaker, about choices that this government has chosen to make: their choices to fund war rooms instead of classrooms; choices to offer a daycare program that at first glance sounds pretty lovely, but then we take away subsidies that the most vulnerable of Albertans need; choices to claw back the Canada disability benefit from amongst those, again, who are the most vulnerable; choices to dismantle our publicly funded and publicly delivered health care and saying, "Oh, it'll just be publicly funded"; choices to dismantle democracy, making it harder, ensuring that, in fact, instead of making it easier for folks to vote, it will actively be disenfranchising them; a choice to put a thumb on the scale of what should be free, fair collective bargaining.

As my colleague from Edmonton-Manning noted, workers have had enough. I would urge this government to learn from history and support this motion.

Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 524 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:08 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

For the motion:

Al-Guneid	Hoffman	Renaud
Batten	Hoyle	Shepherd
Boparai	Irwin	Sigurdson, L.
Eremenko	Kayande	Sweet
Ganley	Metz	Wright, P.
Hayter		

Against the motion:

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

Totals:	For – 16	Against – 43
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[Motion Other than Government Motion 524 lost]

Government Motions

Time Allocation on Bill 55

64. Mr. Amery moved on behalf of Mr. Schow:
Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 55, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in second reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we only have a few minutes to debate this, I'm going to get right to the heart of it. This is the 64th time that this government has brought in closure since they were elected in 2019. [interjections] Oh, and they're proud. They're proud of the fact that Albertans are losing their minds and they're so frustrated about how the government is railing ahead on the privatization of health care that they're going to cheer – cheer, Mr. Speaker – for stifling democracy and for shutting down debate. It is shameful. The act of this bill is shameful, and the fact that the government is trying to bring it through in such a covert method is disrespectful to the people who have elected them to be here to fight for things like improving public health care, not privatizing it, for things like addressing the cost-of-living crisis, not making it even more unaffordable in the province of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, the government whip, you know, was one of the folks banging on his desk just now, and I would guess that he probably looks to some former Premiers with some admiration. I would guess that he would look to Ralph Klein and think: that guy got some good stuff done. And I will tell you that Ralph Klein would have never brought in closure 64 times. Ralph Klein showed courage and strength, and he was not cowardly in bringing through these closure motions to shut down debate. He would walk out onto the steps of the Legislature and engage with people in the middle of protests. He wouldn't hide in this place and bring through closure motions to shut down debate.

Mr. Speaker, it is so disrespectful for this government to come in here and think that they know better and that they won't even allow for fair, democratic engagement. I have many amendments, and I had some for second reading. Hopefully, the government will consider rejecting this heavy-handed motion and they will actually come to this place for consideration of how to take ideas and make them better.

I just mentioned in the last debate that when I engage with students, we often talk about what happens in this place, and one of the things they say is: how does an idea become a bill? We talk about the various stages and the opportunity for one person's idea to get amended, for one person's idea to be either improved by taking out the bad parts or putting in more good parts.

What the government is doing here is saying that the idea brought forward by the Minister of Health: not a single person in this place – not a single opposition member, not a single private member, not a single minister on the front bench who's not the Minister of Health – has any right to be able to engage, for that thorough process to be able to make a terrible bill a little less bad. Mr. Speaker, it is so disrespectful to democracy but also to the private members of this place when the government trots in a government motion to ham-fist legislation and drive it through in one hour, and they don't even give their own members the opportunity to engage on this or the members of the opposition. We absolutely have ideas on how this bill can be less bad.

I have several amendments for Committee of the Whole specifically focused on curtailing the government's opportunity for privatization. I will tell you that the government members campaigned on a public health guarantee. The pictures are still all over the Internet, the Premier standing in front of an Alberta health care card, I think it was, with UCP branding on the podium, talking about how they could be trusted with health care, that they could be given an opportunity, that they would do everything they could to improve health care within 90 days. I will quote the Premier. Feel free to google "Alberta" and another word – this time it would be "days since the 90-day guarantee," I believe it was – and see exactly how many days it's been.

4:30

The government could bring in legislation that would make families safer and more supported when it comes to housing. They could bring legislation that is focused on the measles outbreak. They could actually bring in staffing ratios for long-term care or assisted living in other facilities to make sure that those front-line health care workers aren't run off their feet and that the patients they're caring for can have quality care when and where they need it.

Instead, the government is bringing forward motions to stop debate on their attempt to recycle Bill 11. Bill 11 is the Ralph Klein bill that I refer to when I say that Ralph had the courage of his convictions to show up, face people on the steps of the Legislature, and answer for what he was proposing instead of what the government is proposing, which is to come in here, shove through

this bill as quickly as possible. They only tabled it last week, Mr. Speaker, and now here they are trying to bring this all – they tabled it the Thursday before. We've had it just for a few days. Here they are trying to shove this through the Legislature without giving any of us the opportunity to make a bad bill a little bit less bad, and if you think it's good, feel free to have a thorough debate on that and defend your terrible legislation.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 64 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:31 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Johnson	Sawhney
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Jones	Schow
Bouchard	LaGrange	Schulz
Cyr	Loewen	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	Rowswell	

Against the motion:

Al-Guneid	Hoffman	Renaud
Batten	Hoyle	Shepherd
Boparai	Irwin	Sigurdson, L.
Eremenko	Kayande	Sweet
Ganley	Metz	Wright, P.
Hayter		

Totals: For – 41 Against – 16

[Government Motion 64 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 55 Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

[Adjourned debate May 7: Ms Sigurdson]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Government Motion 64, agreed to earlier this afternoon, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of Bill 55, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, in second reading.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has one minute left to speak.

I recognize the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't know if I can actually say that I'm pleased to rise to speak to this bill. I rather wish this bill wasn't happening at all. I think it is incredibly problematic. This legislation is private hospitals. It's American-style, two-tier health care. That's what it is, and the UCP just brought in closure. This

bill has been before the House for a week, and it has had one hour and 59 minutes of debate at this moment. So the closure motion means that it will pass second reading – that's the initial stage where we're meant to be allowed to ask questions of this very weighty, several-hundred page bill – in under three hours by the time that we're done here. I mean, that just really tells you how much the UCP thinks the public deserves to consider this, which is, in my view, an attack on fundamental Canadian values. There is nothing we hold more highly in our hearts in this country than our public health care system, and this bill is an attack on that.

4:50

Now, I'm happy to walk through the case of why I think that's the case buried somewhere in these several hundred pages, but first I want to talk a little bit about the purpose of this place, the point of the Legislature. People ask me that sometimes – right? – because the opposition has the minority in here. We don't form the majority. We lose the votes. The government brings in bills, and eventually the bills pass, so what is it we are doing in here by debating? Well, we're giving the public the opportunity to consider what's happening. We're giving the public the opportunity to weigh in, and this has happened before, Mr. Speaker. A government brought in private health care like this, and the public pushed back, and the government had to walk it back. We successfully, the people of this province successfully defended our public health care in that instance.

Well, the UCP have learned a lesson from that, but not the lesson you would hope that they would learn. They didn't learn that Albertans are Canadians and that we care deeply about public health care. Instead, what they learned is that they should jam it through before the public has a chance to see what they are doing. Mr. Speaker, nothing says, "we're proud of our actions" quite like trying to slip it through before anyone notices. The UCP know that this is private health care. Some of their ministers may have deluded some of their members, but by and large, there are definitely some of them over there that know exactly what this is and that know exactly what the impacts will be for the people in this country.

This place is meant to be sunshine, disinfectant, debate in the public square. It is meant to be the essence of democracy. We are all elected to represent certain constituents. We are their voice. We are sent to this place to act on their behalf, and I can tell you that my constituents don't want this. I don't think that the UCP's constituents probably want this. This is why they're trying to rush it through before those people have the opportunity to see what's being done. That's what's being revoked here, the opportunity to debate, to raise the issue to the public, for the public, for civil society, which is part of our democracy, to bring its resources to bear to push back and stop this like they did the last time.

Walking through the bill, the problematic section I would say starts – it's part 2.2, Management and Operation of Approved Hospitals. It begins on page 88 with the definition section, which is section 1.9761. The numbering is very odd because, again, the government was trying to slip this through, so they've put it in in the weirdest way possible. Under section (f) it talks about hospital services. Right now in Alberta one of the things you cannot do is an in-patient surgery in a private facility. There are some instances of outpatient surgeries, but hospitals, things that are designated as hospitals, are public in this province right now. Not after this bill passes.

Page 90 talks about designation of approved hospitals, so it's section 1.9763, in which a minister is picking what will be designated as a hospital. It then goes on, on page 91, to talk about agreements, so what a hospital can and can't do will be governed by an agreement, an agreement that will be between the government

and that operator, that will not come before the House, that will not come under public scrutiny, an agreement where we won't know what's in it.

Then it talks about the responsibility of hospital operators to deliver health services in a hospital. It's very redundant, but trust me, it becomes very problematic. They've tried to make it, as far as I can tell, as circular as humanly possible. On page 99 we talk about liability for proper charges. Now, if you aren't creating a situation where hospitals are billing patients privately, you don't need to talk about what's a proper charge. You don't need to talk about what they can charge the patient for and what they can charge the government for, unless that's what you're creating.

But I would say that the incredibly problematic part, where the case becomes clear, is on page 113 in the regulation section. It is very transparently section 1.97699993.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

An Hon. Member: Oh, yeah, that one.

Ms Ganley: That one.

It talks about what powers the cabinet has. The cabinet, not coming to this place, not coming before the Legislature, not under the watch of the public but behind closed doors, published in various ways, depending on it, has the opportunity to make regulations about the designation of approved hospitals; the responsibilities of hospitals; the approval of the location, design, and construction; the standards in a hospital in terms of delivery and respecting admission policies, rather importantly, suggesting to me that they can have policies on who is and isn't admitted. That is, after all, the point of private health care. That's how they generate a profit. They take on only certain types of patients, people who have the ability to pay extra, people who are young and have uncomplicated medical conditions, people who are unlikely to experience complications. That's how they generate a profit. They earn the same money for doing a simpler surgery on a less complex patient who has the ability to pay for a bunch of extras.

Basically, cabinet is making the regulations that fill this out. Those circular definitions we talked about – hospital services, health services, all those things – cabinet is going to fill that out. Essentially, what they're saying is: well, it's only probably private health care, but don't worry; trust us. Well, Madam Speaker, Albertans have heard "don't worry; trust us" from this government before. It's never gone exceptionally well. I think back to such instances as: "Don't worry; we won't mine for coal. Oh, yes, we will; oh, no, we won't; oh, yes, we will." Or, for instance, "Don't worry; we won't bring in an Alberta police force," which is also a bill before us in this particular session.

I think that Albertans will be worried. They have a right to be worried. And I think it's very clear that this gives the UCP cabinet the ability to create private health care, and not just – like, two-tier, American-style health care. Let's understand what we're talking about. We're talking about: some people are too poor to deserve the same level of care. That's what's happening. This is a value that is fundamental to Canadians. That crosses all political stripes generally, Madam Speaker. There are people who would consider themselves conservative who don't want two-tier, American-style health care. So this is problematic; it's problematic for everyone. I would really like the members opposite to consider for a moment what it is that's happening right here. What you're doing is wrong. It's not arguable. It's not debatable. It's not "well, maybe." It's wrong.

Look, we in this Chamber are generally privileged people. There is more diversity now than there was, say, a decade ago in here, but many people here come from privileged backgrounds. We would

never have had to face the choice of medication or food. We would never have had to decide what a loved one's life is worth in terms of dollars and cents. But this is potentially what we're facing. The UCP will tell you: "Oh, no, no, no. Don't worry. Don't worry. There'll still be a system for the public." Sure, a system with longer waits, which probably delivers poorer care because they're being asked to do more work, sometimes two or three times as much work, with the same amount of money. I'd like to think that everyone in this Chamber has known someone who maybe didn't come from a super privileged background.

5:00

I mean, look, the truth is that if my kid was sick, I would do anything to make her well – anything – so I kind of get where this comes from, rich people wanting to jump their kids to the front of the queue. But I think it's based on a really faulty premise. It's based on the premise that they think that they love their kids more than people without money love their kids, and that's just not true. The truth is that I think all of us, whether we have ourselves been in a position where we had limited access to funds or whether we have known someone who was in that position, must understand – we must understand – what this would do to someone, to have their loved one denied care, to have their child receive slower and lesser care than someone else's child receives simply because they don't have the money.

Madam Speaker, what I will say is that while I may have come from a relatively privileged background, my parents taught me better than this. My parents taught me that everyone deserves a shot, that everyone deserves health care, that everyone deserves the basics. They taught me that other people love their children just as much as I do, that other people have the same experience of pain and fear when they are sick. I would like to think that at least some of the members over there, who seem to be feeling no moral feelings about this whatsoever, would know that was the case. This is American-style health care. It is exactly what you see on TV. It is people having to wait longer. It is ambulances having to drive to a farther hospital while someone's life is at risk in the back because that person can't pay.

Now, maybe – no. You know what? I don't believe it. I don't believe it. Why would the UCP bring in something to enable them to create private health care in cabinet if they weren't planning to do it? They're obviously planning to do it. They just wanted to do it without the public knowing about it. I think that tells you something. I think it tells you that somewhere they know that what they're doing is wrong. They know that what they're doing will harm people. They know that the impact of this will be that those who need the most, those who are sicker will get less care if they don't have the ability to pay.

They know that this means hospitals that can deny people on the basis of their pre-existing health conditions, on the basis of their financial means, on – well, we'll never really know what basis, will we? The regulations are being made in cabinet, and then those things, the admission policies, will probably ultimately be outlined in the agreement between the hospital and the UCP. That's an agreement that won't be able to be FOIPed. Even if it could have been FOIPed before, it won't be able to be FOIPed now because they've also brought in a suite of privacy legislation to make sure that the public doesn't get access to those documents.

Madam Speaker, what I will say about this bill is that I could not possibly be more opposed to the substance of this bill or to the way it's being done. Thank you.

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

Ms Al-Guneid: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just as the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, I also have the displeasure to rise and speak on Bill 55, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. It is an interesting timing for this bill. I was meeting with constituents and local stakeholders last week. They just moved from Ontario last November and chose the beautiful riding of Calgary-Glenmore as home. One of the first things they mentioned to me is that they have been in Alberta for six months now, and they cannot find a family doctor. Six months. This is a young family with young kids who will probably need regular visits and checkups.

My question to the minister is: how does this bill, Bill 55, respond to Albertans' urgent need to have a family doctor? According to the Alberta Medical Association there are 650,000 Albertans who are currently searching for a family doctor. Albertans need more doctors. Albertans want less wait times at the emergency rooms and less wait times for surgeries and for diagnostic tests like MRIs. That's it.

I often like to bring some of my personal experiences into debate, Madam Speaker. I grew up in Yemen, and my father is a physician, so I grew up in that space. It's important to note that Yemen does not have a universal health care system. While my family had the privilege to access and have all the health care services they needed, I knew thousands and thousands of people did not. My father volunteered many of his weekends to go to rural areas to help with delivering access to health care services, and he used to take us with him to learn and see kids, to see what happens there, and for us it was an exceptional opportunity to see what's happening across the country. It was eye opening. I saw first-hand the importance of strong public health care systems, and I learned what happens when you do not have equitable access to essential health care services. I saw the impact on children, on seniors, on women, and the most vulnerable.

For decades, Madam Speaker, we have had a world-class health care system here in Alberta. Let's keep it that way. Albertans want more doctors and less wait times at the emergency services and less wait times for surgeries. Albertans want to see a functional and thriving public, universal health care system that reaches everyone and not a private and U.S.-style, two-tier system. I think the Member for Calgary-Mountain View did an excellent job in dissecting the areas in the bill where we see the problematic areas in this bill.

Albertans want to see public health experts like the chief medical officer provide timely advice on how to keep their children and themselves safe. Instead, Albertans are getting more health outbreaks, from E coli to measles. As of today, May 12, Alberta has 365 cases. In comparison, there are nine cases in British Columbia and 27 in Saskatchewan. Measles cases in Alberta are six times higher than other western provinces combined. Let that sit, Madam Speaker. According to the Alberta Medical Association we need a strong vaccination campaign to achieve a 95 per cent immunization rate for community protection. It will take a collective effort and many voices to reach this goal. This disease is preventable. We have prevented it in the past. The UCP government is late in this vaccination campaign, and they need to engage more with the public to avoid more children going to the ICU.

As a mother this is heartbreaking. We all want our kids to be safe and healthy. Instead, we get Bill 55, that meddles with the hospital administration and governance. Instead, we get this bill that wants to overhaul hospital governance, and all hospital types will be lumped under this term of "an approved hospital." Instead of improving wait times, we get this bill that replaces and eliminates hospital boards and replaces them with hospital operators. Instead of securing more doctors, we get more ministerial oversight and more power centralization. The

Minister of Health is given direct authority over hospital-related bylaws within specific health sectors.

5:10

Madam Speaker, I've noticed this session there is this pattern and theme across many UCP bills. They create these bizarre legal avenues to decrease our checks and balances and increase power and authority at the ministerial offices. We have seen this power centralization in Bill 52, that allows the Minister of Affordability and Utilities to make regulations, to specify reliability services however he wants. Then we've seen this power and discretion in Bill 45, that makes oil and gas emissions data exclusive to the province and restricts federal officials from collecting emissions data directly from Alberta-based energy companies without provincial authorization. By the way, this includes both the physical facilities and corporate offices.

We have Bill 45 and Bill 52 giving the Premier and the ministers more power and heavy-handed government interventions, and now we see the same amount of discretion and exclusive power given to the Minister of Health in Bill 55. In this bill the Minister of Health can designate hospital operators, including provincial health agencies, provincial health corporations, or any person, really – it could be public, and it can also be a private entity – and it's called an approved hospital. With all due respect, Madam Speaker, no minister should hold this amount of power at their political office. These are technical questions and not up to the minister to decide what's an approved hospital and what's not from her political office. If this is not a path towards privatization, then I do not know what that is.

Many health care professionals have sounded the alarm about Bill 55, Madam Speaker. Lorian Hardcastle, a University of Calgary health law professor, said that the further concentration of control over public health within the provincial government is likely to concern many people. I quote here, quote: many people would point to the government's silence on the measles outbreak as sort of evidence that the government is more concerned about politics and appeasing voters and pandering to the voting base than it is about public health. End quote. The United Nurses association stated, "It is very clear now that despite claims they intend to protect public health care, the UCP plans to open the door wide to full U.S.-style privatization of Alberta's public health care system."

The former dean of the medical school at the University of Calgary, the former president of the Alberta Medical Association called out the government on this bill and its path towards privatization while Albertans are really – all they need and are looking for are more family doctors and less wait times at the emergency service and less wait times for surgeries and diagnostic tests like MRIs. Madam Speaker, how is it possible that the government isn't able to listen to all these experts, all these specialists in different places in our health care sectors and their warnings as they implement Bill 55?

This bill is chaos by design. I cannot support it, and I will not be voting for it, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, it's not really my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 55, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, but here we are. One of the things I'd like to say before getting into the meat of the bill is that I was actually shocked when the Member for Edmonton-Glenora said that it was 64 times this motion was brought in to just stop debate after an hour. You know, in the House there are 87 of us that were elected to this place. I would hope that with a bill as complex as the one that we saw when this government tabled Bill 55, it would allow us enough time to

actually have all members represent or share the comments and the thoughts from their constituents, but this kind of motion doesn't actually allow that. It's unfortunate that this is where we are, that we currently have a government that thinks they know better than Albertans, they know better than experts, they know better than, you know, the people that use the system, and they're bringing in these sweeping changes and then silencing the opposition and not giving Albertans a chance to weigh in. It's unfortunate that we're seeing this pattern. It's not surprising, but it's unfortunate.

What's also very unfortunate is that, you know, this government refuses to actually call it what it is. What my colleagues have been saying, and they're absolutely correct, is that this government is ushering in a two-tiered health care system. I don't know, Madam Speaker, if you've ever experienced American health care. Even at a bit of a distance, it's actually quite shocking.

I can recall two instances that stick out. I actually lived in the United States for about a year. I lived in New York State. I was a younger person at the time, and I can remember a parent saying to me: don't get sick, do not get sick, do not get sick here. You know, as kids do, they get sick and end up in the hospital, and even for some minor tests that somebody would maybe get going to emerg, even just the bill for that was shocking.

Another experience. My sister and her family decided to travel to Ohio, to drive to Ohio, actually, to visit my brother-in-law's family who live in Ohio. They're Americans. On their way one of their sons got really, really sick. I think he was maybe 10 or 11 at the time. He got really, really sick and ended up needing an emergency appendectomy. Now, obviously, because we are covered under Alberta health care here, there was the ability to recoup those costs or not to pay the bill that came, but I'll tell you that because it was an emergency appendectomy – and I'm not a physician, so I don't know what would cause people to have to be admitted and stay longer – he had to stay longer than the average surgery. I think he stayed for a couple of days, and the bill was, like, over \$50,000, and that was for a child for an appendectomy, something that you really can't prevent or plan for.

Now, one more example before I move on. This was an adult, actually, who had pretty good health insurance. I don't know if you're familiar with the way American health insurance works, but if you don't have it through your employer, it's pretty darn expensive to get privately. This person, you know, had their own business, had health insurance actually as part of the benefit plan for himself and employees, so there was, you know, not a bad plan. I wouldn't say that it was like platinum level, but it was pretty good.

This person, weirdly enough, also ended up with an appendectomy, which is kind of strange, and ended up needing to be hospitalized as well. I think it's probably because it was bad enough that it burst or whatever appendixes do, and he ended up staying, let's say, for under a week. Now, this person actually had pretty good insurance, but just the co-pay portion was over \$40,000. Now, that's shocking that this is somebody with the means to afford health care and the means to afford insurance.

For the government members to be so excited about this bill that they're willing to jam it through by limiting debate – and this bill does actually open the door for American-style health care. I don't think, Madam Speaker, that they understand sort of what they're unleashing here on Albertans. I think if Albertans, all Albertans, understood what this government was doing, they would be up in arms, but perhaps that's the strategy, right? Shut the opposition up. Make this go by quickly, and all good. That seems like the strategy.

Now, what I do know is that Albertans want more doctors. They want less wait time. They want publicly funded, publicly delivered health care. They want health care that meets their needs where they are, and that's not what they're getting.

All of us, I'm quite sure, in this Chamber have had casework or phone calls or e-mails from constituents that are waiting on a surgery. Perhaps it's a knee or a hip or a shoulder. Whatever it is, we're all hearing stories of extended wait times, so people are having to get more opioids, let's say, to manage the pain. Their quality of life has just tanked. They're stuck at home. Relationships are strained because of the pain. People have lost jobs. People have had to leave jobs because of extended wait times, and they don't seem to be getting any better, Madam Speaker.

These are the things that Albertans want. They want more doctors. They want better access. They want it publicly delivered. They want to know they will not have to pull out their credit card or their debit card to pay for health care services, but that's not what this government is doing. What we're getting instead are cutting and privatizing, you know, and I think – I wish this government wasn't inspired by the Republicans and the Trump administration, but they really do seem to be, because this is the direction that we're going.

5:20

Now, some of the key changes that we see in this piece of legislation are around hospital administration and governance, the ability to designate operators, all of the things that my colleagues have said ahead of me, ministerial oversight, that the Health minister will determine who operates hospitals. I don't know about you, Madam Speaker, but I would suggest that a politician is not the ideal person to make these decisions.

We also have the Mental Health and Addiction and the Seniors, Community and Social Services ministers, sector ministers as they're called, playing key roles to oversee and improve how administrators and staff operate in their sector. I don't know about you, Madam Speaker, but I don't think politicians, particularly these ones, are well placed to make these kinds of decisions.

Now, another piece: they want to develop a new agency that reports to the Health minister. That's called the oversight minister, which is actually, you know, kind of an oxymoron at this point, that we've got the Health minister who's now going to be called the oversight minister, yet for the last I don't know how many months we have been talking about the extraordinary incompetence and corruption in Health in this government. We know that there are bloated contracts. We know that there's corruption. Well, we know there's lots of incompetence, yet we're going to give this minister more opportunity to drop the ball, as it were.

So we're changing from Alberta Health Services, one body, to four sector-specific governance model bodies. You know, this seems to be a pattern, Madam Speaker. This government likes to say: "Oh, it's the NDP's fault. We're just cleaning up their mess. It's the NDP's fault." In the last 50 years – 50, five zero – the NDP have been in government for four, so I'd say it's time for this government to start taking responsibility. In the last 50 years we've seen some wicked pendulum swings from centralizing, decentralizing, centralizing, decentralizing. It doesn't actually ever really seem to improve things. It just really sort of points people in another direction. Look at this; it's a bit of a distraction. You know, it's kind of funny for a government that likes to pat themselves on the back so much about cutting red tape. They've just blown that up. They're just not calling this red tape, but that's what it is.

Now, there are a lot of concerns that we have. We are concerned about the centralization of power and the potential for mismanagement. I think just the fact that there's potential for more mismanagement should alarm this government because we've already seen their track record over six years, and it is dismal.

I also worry about the politicization of public health decisions. I mean, come on. We've seen examples of this again and again and again, and I thank my colleague from Calgary-Glenmore for

pointing out the measles disaster that we're currently in. We should not be talking about this in 2025. This should not be an issue in 2025, yet here we are.

You know, I think most of us in this place can remember what it was like under then Premier Jason Kenney. Now, listen, I am no fan of that fellow, but when he brought in the public health rules that he did, he did so based on some science, based on facts, and based on experts. I think that was the time that we in the opposition could actually support decisions because we were being pointed to actual facts that led this government to make a decision. What's really odd about all of that was that was the vehicle that caused him to get tossed out. He was replaced, and it ushered in this whole new government that is very much antiscience, antiexpert.

There are all kinds of reasons to be worried about this bill: the erosion of independent oversight, the negative impact on the health care workforce, to even just name a few concerns. There are a lot of concerns, and I know that a lot of my colleagues have things to say, so with that, I will take my seat.

Thank you.

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

Member Kayande: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Many of my colleagues have so far talked about the creeping spectre of privatization that embeds this doorstep of a Bill 55 that, again, as my colleague the MLA for Calgary-Mountain View has pointed out, is being jammed through. I think this is the first Legislature working day since this bill has been put in place. So with maybe just a shockingly short period of time this piece of legislation is being rammed through with very unknown consequences.

I say unknown because they're a little bit uncertain, but we do know what American-style health care means for us as Canadians. Fourteen million Americans have medical debt exceeding \$1,000. Fourteen million Americans have medical debt exceeding \$1,000. Three million Americans have medical debt exceeding \$10,000. Medical debt and associated debt such as trying to pay your medical debt with credit cards and home equity loans is actually the single largest cause of bankruptcy in America, the single largest cause.

Americans spend far more of their economy, far more of their productivity on health care than Canadians do. In the United States 16.6 per cent of GDP is spent on health care spending. The similar number in Canada is 11.2 per cent. That means that Americans spend on average 6 percentage points more of their GDP; 50 per cent more of their economy is spent on health care than it is in Canada. These are statistics from the OECD.

Now, what do Americans get from that? Well, it turns out that they have a six years lower life expectancy. Life expectancy in Canada is 81.6 years and in the United States is 76.4 years. So that means that you're getting in the United States – in the American health care system you're paying more and you're getting less, which is obviously why this UCP government is so fired up about this whole concept. There's nothing like spending, you know, \$600 million for the Turkish Tylenol guy here and an extra couple of billion dollars for private surgical contracts there, and just spending and spending and spending for nothing. That really seems to get them fired up.

Other outcomes. Well, 7.7 per cent of Canadians are diabetic. In the United States it's 10.7 per cent. Three percentage points of population greater in the United States are diabetic despite all of their spending, despite spending 50 per cent more of their economy on health care spending.

Why does the government want to do this? Why does the government want to do creeping privatization? The answer is, of course, sovereignty, which is what it leads back to, the free

Alberta project. It's going to be a lot tougher for people to vote against Canada when they're losing their health care, when they're losing their strong public health care that they deserve, which is the foundation of this country. Better take it away first because that way when you're joining the United States, we're not losing anything.

This is a shocking statistic: 1 per cent of the U.S. federal budget is spent on dialysis. It's not like 1 per cent of the health budget; 1 per cent of the U.S. federal budget is spent on dialysis. It's six times more than they spend on NASA. There are weapons programs that don't cost as much as dialysis does. And that's the future that this government is sending us down, more and more wasteful and inefficient spending, where the \$600 million sent to the Turkish Tylenol guy is a feature because it starves the public health care system, creates a crisis, and this is a government that will never let a crisis go to waste. Very similar to how Winston Churchill talked about it: never let a crisis go to waste for corruption.

Madam Speaker, I would really urge the government to really think about this a little bit more because the path that they are putting us on is one where we spend more and more of our productive capability, we spend more and more of our economy, we spend more and more of our tax dollars, we spend more and more of our individual dollars trying to get to a health care system that is not nearly as good as the one that we have and continues to get worse. It's shameful, and the fact that this is being done without any debate at all is kind of an indication that they don't trust the process. They don't trust Albertans. They certainly don't have my trust.

5:30

Madam Speaker, I really urge the government to backtrack on this, take a break. Let's come back to this next time the House is in session and spend a little bit of time on this. It's what Ralph Klein would have done.

Thank you.

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

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak about Bill 55. It's quite a big bill. It's amazing that we were only given this last week and now we're only going to have four hours to debate it, with all of these MLAs that are probably going to want to get up and speak on behalf of their constituents. It has serious consequences that it carries for the women in Alberta. This isn't just a health bill. It's a power shift. It's a privatization framework. It's quite a rollback of transparency and public accountability. At every stage it's women, especially vulnerable women, who are the ones most likely to be harmed by this bill.

Let's begin with the question that hasn't been answered. Why is the bill referring to sector ministers and an oversight minister instead of the Minister of Health? If the government believes in accountability, why is it dividing responsibilities across a patchwork of ministries instead of giving Albertans a clear answer to a simple question: who is responsible for health care in Alberta? When things go wrong – and they do – it's women who are left to pick up the pieces. It's women who are trying to advocate for their aging parents, women trying to access care in their communities, women trying to find answers in a system that already feels impossible to navigate. If we don't know who's in charge, how are we supposed to be heard?

Now, let's look at Bill 55. Who is allowed to operate the hospitals? The bill says that the minister can designate a hospital operator if they're satisfied that the person – yes, that includes private corporations – is capable of delivering the services. There's no requirement that that operator be public. There's no protection

against for-profit decision-making. There is no clarity for service expectations. So let's ask the question that the bill refuses to: could a corporation like Telus be approved to operate a hospital like the children's Stollery? Could a chartered surgical facility be reclassified as an approved hospital? Could those operators be allowed to deliver care without public input, without local governance, and without service guarantees? If the answer is yes, then we are handing over decisions about essential care, including pediatric, emergency, and, yes, reproductive care, to entities with no obligation to the public good. That's where the gender impact becomes undeniable.

In many regions hospitals are the only places women can have access to urgent reproductive procedures, whether after pregnancy loss, complications, or trauma. These aren't elective. They aren't political. They are medical necessities. Yet Bill 55 gives no assurances that those services will continue under a private operator. If a private hospital decides a procedure is too expensive or too controversial, there is no requirement for it to be offered. What happens when a woman in Lethbridge or High Level or Peace River needs care that their local hospital no longer provides? She travels, she waits, or she goes without, and for rural women, low-income women, or Indigenous women already navigating multiple barriers, that's not just inconvenient; it's dangerous. We cannot pretend to champion women's health while handing hospital operations to the highest bidder with no guarantee of care.

This bill also changes how medical officers of health report. Instead of operating independently, they will now report directly to the minister. These are the professionals who guide our responses during outbreaks, who lead vaccination efforts, who issue warnings and recommendations during a crisis. Their job depends on trust, and their words must be clear and not filtered through politics.

Women, especially mothers, carry that invisible work of managing family health. They rely on that information. They use it to keep their families safe. They use science, because when science is filtered through political priorities, the people who bear the weight of the family care are the first to suffer, and the system doesn't stop failing there.

Now, Madam Speaker, I want to raise a deeply troubling section of this bill, the one that allows patients to be discharged into shelters, hotels, or on the street. Let me ask plainly. Is this government willing to guarantee that patients, especially seniors, especially women in unsafe home situations won't be discharged without proper care or housing? Right now that guarantee isn't in the bill. So what happens when that patient is still fragile, when they're elderly or isolated or recovering from a trauma? Who is going to pick up the pieces? We already know the answer. It's going to be the daughter, a partner, a sister, a woman who now becomes a caretaker overnight with no resources, no support, and no say in the matter. This is how care gets downloaded not just from the government to community but from community to women. This isn't just a discharge policy. It's a policy of quiet abandonment.

That leads us to the next concern. The bill mostly defers decisions around hospital operator roles and responsibilities to regulations. Why not legislate those expectations? Why leave it to cabinet? Because then details are buried in regulation. They can be changed without notice, without debate, and without public input. That kind of secrecy hurts people who already struggle to be heard. It hurts women who sit on community health councils, who advocate for prenatal care in their region. It hurts women with disabilities trying to access care with dignity, and it hurts the mothers and daughters who are holding their families together with duct tape and sheer determination.

Finally, we need clarity on patient privacy. The bill introduces new provisions allowing personal health information to be disclosed without patient consent to another hospital or an attending staff. Here

is the question. Will this government guarantee that private hospital operators will not receive personal health information without clear patient consent? For women fleeing violence or those with complex trauma histories or simply anyone that values their privacy, that distinction matters. Consent matters, transparency matters, and this bill offers very little of either.

Since this bill was introduced last week, on Thursday, we've received e-mails to my office from Albertan patients, caregivers, nurses who are scared about what this bill will mean for them and for the people they love. I'd like to read a few of them into the record today because it's their words that deserve to be heard, and these are the people that I have been elected to represent.

Abhiraam writes:

My name is Abhiraam, and I am a constituent of Calgary-Edgemont. I'm writing today to express worry surrounding Bill 55, and the overall direction that Alberta healthcare has been trending under the UCP.

Over the past few years, a few developments have been alarming.

The decentralization of the AHS, which risks fragmenting the healthcare system, ultimately reducing coordination, compromising quality of care (especially in rural areas), and opening the door for further privatization to fill in the gaps.

Reliance on "faith-based providers", such as Covenant Health, denying access to healthcare for many people, such as LGBTQ+ individuals and those seeking reproductive care and end-of-life care.

Now, Bill 55, which would allow hospitals to be turned over to private operators who could charge patient fees. This fundamentally opposes the principles of universal healthcare, and opens the door to a tiered healthcare system, based on ability to pay.

It is also concerning that Bill 55 would result in the further politicization of healthcare decisions, centralizing power to the cabinet, and sidelining medical professionals. This politicization and centralization of decisions was underway in the previous developments I mentioned, and going down this road compromises the crisis response. Decisions in emergencies should be made with evidence and expertise, not political and religious dogma.

5:40

I also got a letter from Connie in Hawkwood, who wrote to say: Please do not promote or pass Bill 55. Albertans cannot afford further degradation of our health care system.

For the record, I am opposed to this Bill and am asking each of you to vote against it.

Thanks for supporting your constituents and all Albertans through your opposition of this destructive legislation.

Well, Connie, I can promise you that I will not be voting for this bill.

We also received a letter from Tyler.

Money in politics and privatized medicine is just a step towards corruption. I'm a social conservative guy. I'm open to vote for anyone but this government has lost any confidence or hope it wouldn't be as bad as what people were saying. I didn't vote for them.

Megan, finally, shared:

Everyday I'm scared of what the UCP is going to do next. Bill 55 is today's reason, but really I could point at everything and anything they've done, and it would still be true. (See: measles outbreak, the escalating cases and the premier's anti-vax rhetoric, the proposed legislation on election rule breaking, anything related to separatism, and her freedom trips to the states, all come to mind.)

Public healthcare is a binding promise. Citizens pay taxes and the province guarantees care for everyone – it's the agreement we made. When a government breaks that promise by

forcing irreversible privatization it abandons its duty and betrays the people.

Privatization turns health services into commodities. Profit motives replace public welfare and drive up costs while limiting access for those who need care most. Once public assets are handed over or governance powers centralized, reversing these changes becomes nearly impossible. By rushing sweeping reforms in a massive omnibus bill –

massive –

without genuine debate or stakeholder input a government silences elected bodies and sidelines the public. That is not reform, it is a power grab.

I have no idea what to do but I'm terrified. Terrified about what comes next, if our healthcare can even be fixed, if we're just screaming into the void at this point.

My constituents are scared.

Madam Speaker, Bill 55 doesn't just shuffle lines on an org chart. It shifts power away from communities. It moves decisions out of the public hands. It cuts oversight in the place where oversight is most needed, and every step of the way it's women who are going to be left to carry these consequences: the women raising kids, the women caring for parents, the women doing the work inside the system, and the women in long-term care who no longer have a voice.

If this government is serious about health care reform, it needs to start listening to the people who hold health care together, and that means listening to women, all of them. I will not be supporting Bill 55.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, if members in this Assembly would like to have conversations, perhaps the peace lounge outside is the best place to do so, particularly the hon. Member for Grande Prairie, the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, and the hon. minister of energy.

Right now the hon. Member for Edmonton-South has the floor.

Member Hoyle: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise here to speak to Bill 55, which introduces significant changes to Alberta's health system, particularly in hospital administration and governance. These changes mark a major shift in Alberta's health system, moving away from Alberta Health Services towards a four sector-specific governance model.

Despite what the Minister of Health has said many times in this Chamber, this bill looks like a huge step towards privatization of Alberta's health care system, and it's incredibly problematic on many, many levels. Clearly, what this government is saying versus what they're doing is at great odds with the values of Albertans, so how can Albertans even trust this government?

Allowing Bill 55 to pass would queue things up for the government to very quickly turn over public hospital infrastructure to be operated by private, for-profit interests, something they've been building the groundwork to do for many months. Bill 55 will continue the redistribution of responsibilities and health care workers started last year by moving all public functions out of Alberta Health Services. This means that medical officers of health and public health inspectors currently working for AHS would become government health employees. Front-line programs such as newborn screenings, communicable disease control, well-baby clinics, routine immunizations, and health prevention and promotion programs would move to a new agency, Primary Care Alberta.

This UCP government's track record on health care is abysmal, Madam Speaker. Just look at the recent measles outbreak across this province to see evidence of this. Measles is a highly contagious disease and could lead to serious complications, including pneumonia, brain swelling, and even death. Many people would point to the government's silence on this measles outbreak as evidence that

the government is more concerned about politics and appeasing voters and pandering to a voter base than it is about public health for all. The last time this province saw measles cases was in 1987, when 690 cases were confirmed. Vaccination rates in pockets of those regions are far below the 95 per cent threshold experts say is needed for population-level protection. Alberta's former CMOH, Dr. Mark Joffe, told doctors in a webinar last week that the spread of measles in Alberta is a, quote, failure of leadership, as some vulnerable people don't know that it's preventable.

Madam Speaker, that's not to mention the ongoing corrupt care scandal, which has allegations of corruption going beyond a short-sighted and heartless decision. If true, this would be the worst kind of corruption imaginable. No Albertan benefited, besides the UCP's friends and insiders, through bloated contracts. Hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars might have been wasted through these bloated contracts. This isn't just politics. It's money out of Albertans' pockets, money that should have gone to their health care.

In October of 2022 the Premier promised to fix health care in 90 days, but it's now May of 2025, and all the UCP has done is make things worse in health care.

Bill 55 is an absolute train wreck. I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that my constituents in Edmonton-South do not want this bill. Bill 55 does not create more doctors or fix wait times in ERs or reduce long waits for surgeries or MRIs. I cannot support Bill 55 because of the disaster that it is currently. It is not what Albertans want. I would encourage the members opposite to stand with Albertans in ensuring they continue to have excellent access to health care, public health care services, no matter where they are in this province. To do otherwise, in my opinion, would be a grave disservice to all Albertans.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. You have, like, one minute.

Member Irwin: Okay. Perfect. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to get on the record really quickly on Bill 55 to just register, as my colleagues have done so, so well today, our opposition to Bill 55. You know, I share my remarks today as we kick off National Nursing Week, a time when we should be uplifting and recognizing the incredible health care workers across our province. As I've said many times in this Chamber . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Government Motion 64, agreed to earlier this afternoon, one hour of debate has now been completed, and I am required to put to the Assembly all necessary questions to dispose of Bill 55, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, at second reading.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:49 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Al-Guneid	Hoffman	Renaud
Batten	Hoyle	Shepherd
Boparai	Irwin	Sigurdson, L.
Eremenko	Kayande	Sweet
Ganley	Metz	Wright, P.
Hayter		

Totals: For – 42 Against – 16

[Motion carried; Bill 55 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: The House stands adjourned till 7:30 tonight.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:06 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Prayers	3327
Indigenous Land Acknowledgement	3327
Introduction of Guests	3327
Members' Statements	
Industrial Carbon Price.....	3328
Government Priorities	3328
Calgary LRT Green Line.....	3328
Teachers' Contract Negotiations	3328
Calgary Stampede.....	3329
Bill 54	3329
Oral Question Period	
Investigation of Health Services Procurement.....	3329, 3331
Alberta in Canada	3330
Bill 54	3330
Energy Policies and Industry Competitiveness.....	3332
Affordable Housing.....	3332
Film and Television Industry Support	3333
Bill 50	3333
FOIP Requests and Access to Information	3334
Energy Development Policies.....	3335
Bill 55 and Indigenous Health Care.....	3335
Bill 54 and First Nation Treaty Rights.....	3336
Rural Economic Development.....	3336
Notices of Motions	3337
Tabling Returns and Reports	3337
Orders of the Day	3339
Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 212 Organ and Tissue Donor Information Agreement Act.....	3339
Motions Other than Government Motions	
Public-sector Wages	3340
Division	3347
Government Motions	
Time Allocation on Bill 55.....	3347
Division	3348
Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 55 Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2025.....	3348
Division	3355

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