



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, November 3, 2025

Day 6

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

Second Session

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

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Boitchenko, Hon. Andrew, ECA, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
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Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Brar, Gurtej Singh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
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Party standings:

United Conservative: 47

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 2

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, November 3, 2025

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, it being the first sitting day of the week, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Haley Quiring. I invite all members to participate in the official 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.

[Standing ovation]

[The Speaker in the chair]

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

The Speaker: Hon. members, 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 the ancestral territory of the Cree, Dene, Blackfoot, Saulteaux, Iroquois, and Nakota Sioux people. The recognition of our history on this land is an act of reconciliation, and we honour those who walk with us. We also acknowledge that the province of Alberta exists within treaties 4, 7, 8, and 10 territories and the Métis Nation of Alberta.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, it is my pleasure to introduce members of the public service joining us in the members' gallery today. They are participating in a full-day public service orientation program which explores the legislative, budgetary, and committee processes, enabling each participant to apply their knowledge to their role in the public service. I had the pleasure of meeting with them this morning, and I would now ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Today's wonderful rendition of *O Canada* was performed by Haley Quiring, who is joined by her mother, Amy Quiring, in the Speaker's gallery. Haley is six years old and lives in St. Albert with her family. She loves to camp, hike, and explore. Besides her love of music and singing, she is very creative and loves doing artwork. I ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Also seated in the Speaker's gallery are a group from the Book Publishers Association of Alberta. Their members publish books by local, national, and international authors and provide significant cultural and economic benefits to this province. Alberta book publishers are essential to sharing Alberta's story across Canada and internationally. I ask that they all please stand to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Also joining us in the Speaker's gallery today are Josie Fir and Tony Fir, parents of the Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

School groups, starting with the hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce you to the bright, gifted, and talented students and staff and teachers from New Horizons School in Sherwood Park, which just celebrated its 30th anniversary as a school. Will the students please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you 28 students for Soraya Hafez school and their teachers. I would just ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Other guests, starting with the hon. Member for Airdrie-East.

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly guests from the Alberta Mortgage Brokers Association, the president being a constituent of the great constituency of Airdrie-East. I ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly two of the most dedicated and skilled public servants who ever worked in an MLA's constituency office. Ashley MacInnis has served as my chief of staff for over eight years, and Nosheen Sheikh has been my constituency assistant for six years. I thank my lucky stars every day to have both of them continuing to serve me and our constituents in Edmonton-McClung. I ask Ashley and Nosheen to rise and receive an extra special warm welcome of the Assembly.

Member Irwin: I'd like to introduce some of the family of Dr. Hans Smits, a wonderful human and friend to many, who we lost recently: his partner for life and one of the best people I know, Donna Staszewski; his sister Johanna Andreoff; and his very close friends Judy, Andrew, and Bruce McLellan. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce a guest and friend from Pakistan, Qazi Shahid Pervaz. He has been a lifelong civil servant, and after serving 32 years in various key bureaucratic assignments, he has recently retired as the chief secretary for the province of Sindh, a position equivalent to Deputy Minister of Executive Council here in Alberta. I ask my guest to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

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

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood I'd like to introduce five active volunteers and members of her constituency association: Katie Joosse, Sally Scott, Ken Robinson, Ashley Ogilvie, and Anna Curtis. Can they all please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

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

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am so pleased to introduce to you and through you a very special group of people in recovery joining us this afternoon. The Jellinek Society has been treating addiction and supporting recovery in downtown Edmonton now for over 50 years. They are saving lives. I'm so honoured and happy in welcoming this amazing group to the Legislature today. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to all members of the Assembly on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood I'd like to introduce three folks who've done a lot to build community in that constituency and beyond: Natalie Crawford Cox, Kyla Fisher, and Sally Cooper. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

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

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Linda Lindsay, a new school board trustee and vice-chair of the Edmonton public school board, and Jeff Angelstad, her husband. I ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members Brad Lafortune, executive director of Public Interest Alberta, coming up soon on five years in that role, a community advocate and organizer. I ask him to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Forestry and Parks.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House Justine Ness. Justine is an incredibly ambitious businesswoman from the Drayton Valley-Devon constituency. She's here with her two daughters, Elizabeth and Victoria. If you could please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

Member Boparai: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Kishore Kumar, a distinguished district and session judge visiting from India, and Dr. Kulkaran Singh, a professor of physics who leads a nonprofit providing ambulances and emergency services to the underprivileged. I ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you. [A timer sounded] Just under the wire, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly Mrs. Nashrah Khalid, a passionate mountain climber from Calgary who has summited over 150 peaks in Alberta and B.C., including Mount Assiniboine. I ask that she please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Mandatory Minimum Sentences Court Ruling

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Supreme Court of Canada ruled mandatory minimum sentences of one year to be unconstitutional for pedophiles convicted of possessing and accessing child sexual abuse and exploitation material. I speak for our entire United Conservative caucus when I say that this ruling made me absolutely sick to my stomach.

Canadians across the country are rightfully questioning how the court could come to such an appalling ruling when faced with the heinous crimes of the men before them. These two men possessed over a thousand files containing images and videos of preschool- and elementary-age children being sexually abused. Mr. Speaker, I, like most rational people, believe that sick predators who sexually abuse and exploit children belong behind bars for the rest of their lives. Yet somehow a majority of our nation's Supreme Court ruled that mandating just one year in jail is too harsh a punishment for convicted pedophiles.

This ruling demonstrates a breakdown of morality, the rule of law, and basic human decency in our country, and that's why our Premier has called for the federal government to immediately invoke the Constitution's notwithstanding clause to overturn this ruling and protect our children.

Just last week the leader of Alberta's NDP vowed that an NDP government would never invoke the notwithstanding clause. What I and I suspect many parents across our province would like to know is whether the Alberta NDP opposes the use of the notwithstanding clause to protect our children and overturn this outrageous decision by the Supreme Court. Where do the members opposite stand? Do they believe in judicial supremacy and the subversion of the democratic will of Canadians? Do they believe that mandatory minimums of only one year are unconstitutional for convicted pedophiles? Make no mistake, Mr. Speaker. On this side of the House our United Conservative government firmly stands against this disgusting ruling.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. [some applause] Order.

Hans Smits

Member Irwin: On October 25 the world lost Hans Smits. I first met Hans many years ago when he was the professor for a graduate course I was taking on social studies curriculum. I suppose that "met" is a bit of a stretch because it was an online course through the University of Calgary. Hans, Dr. Smits as I called him then, was a brilliant instructor with a quiet wisdom. He opened my eyes to a whole world of academia that I didn't yet know. Without even seeing his face – this was before the days of Zoom – I felt a connection to Hans.

Fast-forward a few years, I was living in Highlands and I was searching for community after having been away teaching in rural Alberta. I started volunteering with the NDP, and I learned that the

contact person for my area was someone named Hans Smits. What a small world. Immediately Hans welcomed me onto the team, and I got to meet this other incredible human, his partner in life, Donna. How lucky I am to have had Hans come into my life twice. Hans and Donna were so supportive of me in all my campaigns, and they supported so many other candidates at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels. Hans, despite being known as an academic, was very handy, too, building big signs as part of the best election sign crew around. Hans and Donna did so much for me, for so many of us, and so much to build our party. They were honoured with lifetime memberships to the Alberta NDP in 2022.

I'll remember his passion, his kindness, his ability to listen. I'll remember his commitment to social justice and his dedication to people, from protecting our pensions to defending public health care. Like so many teachers, Hans was closely following what's happening with public education. As we continue this fight, I'll be inspired by Hans, as we all should be.

Hans, thank you for all you did to make our neighbourhoods, our province, and our world better. Rest well, my friend. You've earned it. [Disturbance in the gallery]

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order in the gallery!

CPR Month

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize November as CPR month. Through the help of the Heart and Stroke Foundation, they're raising awareness of the critical importance of knowing how to perform CPR as well as how to operate an automated external defibrillator, or AED, to improve survival rates of cardiac arrest outside of hospital settings. According to new analysis from the Heart and Stroke Foundation out-of-hospital cardiac arrests are significantly more frequent than previously thought, occurring one in every nine minutes across Canada. Tragically, they are fatal nine times out of 10. However, the chance of survival doubles if CPR is started immediately and an AED is used.

Cardiac arrest, when the heart suddenly and unexpectedly stops beating, can happen to anyone at any age, often without warning. It's a medical emergency that requires immediate attention. Mr. Speaker, I encourage all my colleagues to support the Heart and Stroke Foundation's efforts to increase awareness for the urgent need of improved bystander response to cardiac arrest. CPR is easy to learn and simple to perform, and AEDs are safe, accessible, and can be used by anyone regardless of prior training. AEDs can even help guide users through the process step by step. The Heart and Stroke Foundation offers various training sessions on how to deliver CPR and how to safely use an AED, including an hour-long workplace program called CardiacCrash. For those looking for more in-depth training courses, the heart safe program offers additional classroom or blended-learning formulas.

Mr. Speaker, every second counts when helping someone in need. I encourage all Albertans to know where to locate the nearest AED in their community and be prepared to act in the event of cardiac emergency. You can't hurt; you can only help. More importantly, you can save a life.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Eastern Slopes Protection and Coal Development Policies

Ms Al-Guneid: Mr. Speaker, this fall I spent time in the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains. Nordegg showed off its beauty. I visited Crescent Falls, Fish Lake, Tay River, Ram Falls, and the

Ram River, a critical source of Alberta's drinking water. As I marvelled at Clearwater county's landscapes, I was stunned to see coal leases surrounding these sensitive ecosystems. This August almost 800,000 people visited the Rockies, a 6 per cent increase from last year. I ask: who would want to recreate in an industrial zone?

It is an understatement to say that coal in these pristine areas is irresponsible. Surface mining, strip mining, mountaintop removal mining, or underground mining: this is the fruit salad that the energy minister keeps throwing around. It does not matter, Mr. Speaker, because runoff from any coal mine will flow into the North Saskatchewan River, which is the water supply for Rocky Mountain House, Drayton Valley, Edmonton, Fort Saskatchewan, and even the province of Saskatchewan.

Selenium contamination in B.C.'s Elk River watershed has become a transboundary issue with the U.S. Teck and Glencore have spent \$1.4 billion trying to treat water for selenium with no success. To date, the responses from the energy and environment ministers on selenium contamination make it clear that they do not take this risk seriously.

1:50

The UCP tries to sell Albertans on jobs in the steel-making coal industry but ignores that the world already makes steel without coal. They fail to acknowledge that mining is a highly automated industry. Just look at the 900 Albertans laid off by Imperial because technology is replacing jobs.

These proposed coal mines in Nordegg and even in Crowsnest Pass have low economic benefit for massive environmental destruction, headwaters pollution, and local economic ruin. Coal in the eastern slopes is a bad deal for Albertans.

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's now time for Oral Question Period. Just before I start, I'm noting that I cut off applause on each side of the House earlier. I tried to let it go on long enough to be respectful and for you to express how important it was. If you have advice on that, I'd suggest you talk to your House leaders on each side and let me know if that's what the House would like.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Now, the first question belongs to the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Children's Health Care Access

Mr. Nenshi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week we learned about Ben. Ben is 11 years old. He's been battling cancer for five and a half years. Due to a relapse he needs chemotherapy as an in-patient that lasts three days, and it must be very carefully scheduled. Last week he was turned away from the Stollery children's hospital due to a lack of space. This is becoming a more and more common occurrence for children with cancer. Can the government explain what they are doing to ensure that all children with cancer get the care they need?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and for the very important question from the Leader of the Opposition. Over the past three months 11 children have experienced short delays starting chemotherapy. Short does not mean acceptable. This is unacceptable and, in fact, it makes the case that we need to expedite construction on the stand-alone Stollery. I'm pleased to report that within 48 hours all of these appointments were rebooked and that

the care was safely provided to the children. Of course: not good enough. That's why we're going to build capacity so we can get more done.

Thank you.

Mr. Nenshi: I really appreciate that answer from the minister. But he said something interesting there. In the throne speech the government stated that they will never again build a stand-alone hospital. They claim that hospitals are underutilized. I have yet to see an underutilized hospital in Alberta. Last year the government set aside \$20 million for planning for a new Stollery but no money for construction, as is their way. Given the throne speech, can we now assume that the government has no plans to proceed with the stand-alone Stollery children's hospital?

The Speaker: The hon. hospitals minister.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can confirm that I was meeting with the Minister of Infrastructure just last week on expediting construction of the stand-alone Stollery. In addition to that, we're also looking at building over 1,000 net-new acute-care spaces: two hospital bed towers in the Edmonton area and one in the Calgary area. The two in Edmonton will be at the Misericordia and Grey Nuns hospitals and the one in Calgary at the South Health Campus.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Nenshi: I find this very confusing. I don't know if I should believe the minister or the throne speech.

This is a pattern with this government. They overpromise; they underdeliver. They promise something; they never budget for it. Ben's story is not unique. Children across the province are facing delays in their care, leading to incredible stress on health care workers and certainly on families and on the children themselves. Based on what the minister just said, is the government now renouncing what they said in the throne speech and committing today to building a stand-alone Stollery?

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, I'm committed to and supportive of building a stand-alone Stollery. As the members opposite may or may not appreciate, proper process must be followed. There must be planning and design before construction funding can be allocated. Again, very supportive and committed to moving this project forward and building the additional acute-care capacity at the Grey Nuns and Misericordia, which will support the whole Edmonton area, and at South Health Campus in Calgary. More acute-care spaces are coming. That's a commitment.

The Speaker: For the second set of questions, the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Nenshi: This government is exceptionally good at being supportive without actually committing to anything.

Premier's Trade Mission to Middle East

Mr. Nenshi: This government, politicians, endless senior staff have now visited the Middle East more often than they've gone to Mar-a-Lago, with about the same level of effectiveness in helping Alberta's economy, which is none. Recently the Premier tweeted some very nice pictures of some very fancy meeting rooms, but I'm not seeing any deals or any investments being created resulting from these trips. Will the Premier be reporting on precisely what she's accomplished on all these trips to the Middle East?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, these trips are essential for Alberta to continue to build the network we need to deliver for Albertans. Whether it be talking about a sovereign wealth fund or ways for us to continue exporting the natural resource energy and oil that this province is world renowned for, these trips are essential for making those connections and making sure the Alberta advantage continues in this increasingly globalized economy. Increasingly where the federal government does not represent our needs, our Premier will be there defending Alberta and our resource industry every step of the way.

Mr. Nenshi: I think the minister just made an incredible announcement. Alberta will now be exporting oil and natural gas to the Middle East. I don't think that's actually happening.

I've got nothing against trade missions. I've been on lots of trade missions, but I tend to go to countries that are interested in investing here or that are our customers. The Premier of Saskatchewan recently spent time in China trying to remove canola tariffs that are hurting our economy, while this Premier goes to places that are direct competitors. How does the government choose where it spends its time on trade missions, and how do we know that these missions actually create jobs here?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to hear that the member opposite is going to support this government's trade missions and all the different trips that we take to make sure that Albertans improve our government and offerings for Albertans every single day. This government can chew and walk at the same time. [interjections] We know what we're doing when it comes to diversifying our trade and making sure that all sorts of different levels of government internationally invest here in Alberta, and the proof is in the pudding. Under the NDP investment crashed. Under the UCP it continues to grow.

The Speaker: I would like to hear the question and the answer this time.

Mr. Nenshi: It certainly is true that this government is good at chewing the fat, chewing the cud, but they've never actually shown that they can actually do two things at the same time.

A prominent media commentator said recently: "I won't be crying the blues if we stop trading with that loathsome regime. Saudi Arabia is not our friend." That same commentator, now the Premier, has now suggested that Saudi Aramco is somehow our ally and that they will help us displace oil from, quote, bad actors. Who does the Premier think is a bad actor? Does she really think that Saudi Arabia will help Alberta export more oil instead of just helping themselves?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to let Albertans decide who they think the bad actor is and who aren't our friends. Over the last couple of elections it's been the NDP. Their policies drive us into the ground, driving investment out, telling Albertans that they can get jobs elsewhere. We believe that Alberta's oil and gas and energy industry is absolutely essential not just to Alberta but to the country's success. If members opposite feel like we shouldn't be investing in relationships to make sure that we see our energy sector grow, that's on them. Voters get to make that decision.

The Speaker: For the third set of questions, the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Nenshi: So much volume, so few answers.

Government-owned Housing Maintenance

Mr. Nenshi: Let's try a different tack. A recent Auditor General report found that this government has over \$1 billion in deferred maintenance on \$2.3 billion in affordable housing assets. Any private company would be bankrupt if they tried that. The report also found that the government doesn't even know the state of disrepair of this housing, and it doesn't have a plan to fix it. Given that we have a duty to make sure that people living in poverty can have decent, safe housing, how did the government let it get this bad?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, previous governments, both NDP and PC, had let the affordable housing stock go into a state of disrepair. But this government two years ago implemented a plan, that the Auditor General has seen and has supported, to be able to make sure that we continue to maintain our housing at the same time as we're bringing on the most affordable housing in the history of the province. We won't be lectured by that member, who couldn't even be bothered to maintain the water pipes in the city of Calgary when he was the mayor.

Mr. Nenshi: Well, if the Auditor General had agreed with the plan, he probably wouldn't have the report saying that the government has no plan.

The lack of repair means that Albertans are living with broken elevators, with mould around their children, with rodent and bug infestations. It's horrible. But this government consistently acts against transparency. In 2019 this government stopped doing housing condition assessments, and now they claim to be shocked – shocked – that things have gotten this bad and blaming it on others. Will the government complete building assessments on all of its properties and commit to sharing that information with Albertans?

2:00

Mr. Nixon: Again, Mr. Speaker, we're assessing all of our buildings. This minister, me, has invested the most in capital maintenance and renewal over the last two years of any minister in history and is the minister of housing that is leading the way anywhere in the country. Again, we won't be lectured by the Official Opposition, led by that member who had his pipes in such disrepair in the city of Calgary you could drive dump trucks through them and the poor people of Calgary couldn't even have a shower for months. That member has no ground to stand on to lecture people when it comes to maintenance.

Mr. Nenshi: Mr. Speaker, I heard a lot of volume there and a lot of bellowing, but what I didn't hear was a commitment to actually help Albertans.

Listen, in all my years as mayor I fought consistently with provincial governments on the state of better conditions for provincially owned housing because we have a duty to ensure that our tenants have a decent place to live. But it was never ever this bad. He can blame it on others. I had six premiers I worked with, but it was never this bad, and things are getting worse. Could the minister attempt to turn down the volume and actually tell us what he's going to do to ensure tenants have a decent place to live?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we're already doing it. That's why we lead the country in housing builds. That's why we lead the country when it comes to capital maintenance and renewal dollars. That's why we have more affordable housing units than ever. The NDP saw wait-lists go up by 75 per cent under their time in government. We've increased supply in Edmonton alone by 30 per cent, and it's

why we're the only jurisdiction where rent is going down. We won't be lectured by that member, again, when he was the former mayor of our largest city who left it in such disrepair that people could not even have showers. Shame on him.

Minimum Wage Rate

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, Albertans have not seen a raise to the minimum wage in over seven years. In the history of Alberta since the minimum wage was brought in, this is the longest stretch working Albertans have gone without a wage hike. No wage increase during some of the highest inflation in decades. It's not a coincidence that wage hikes have ended during the UCP's time in government. This is not a government that believes in paying workers fairly. To the Premier: why has this government worked so hard to kill the Alberta advantage?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of affordability.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the question. We want to make sure that we handle this issue very, very carefully. Youth unemployment across the country is at extremely high levels. The last time the NDP was in power here in Alberta, when they brought in their minimum wage increases, a further 21,000 young people lost their jobs. This isn't that easy. We want to make sure we get it right. We are doing the work. We are talking to those who are working in the field, employers and employees, because this time we don't want more young people to lose their jobs.

Ms Gray: Youth unemployment is higher now under this government than it ever was under the NDP. In addition to suppressing the minimum wage, the UCP brought in less than minimum wage for child labour. They said that they were doing this to address youth unemployment, but since they added these child labour rates, youth unemployment levels are worse than ever. Businesses are now incentivized to move on from young adult workers in favour of cheaper child labour. To the Premier: when will this government end this job-killing UCP policy of allowing Alberta's children to work for less than minimum wage?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, this is why we're addressing youth unemployment by bringing forward the youth employment incentive: \$8 million to help employers get youth to work. We are doing it in a responsible way by not putting more youth out of work. We're making it easier for employers to hire youth to work for them, to get their first-time jobs so they can get the skills, so they can move on from that. We're very proud of this work. We want to take an entire-government approach on this, and we want to make sure young people can find the jobs they need to start great careers.

Ms Gray: This government cut the STEP program, and now they're proud to reinvent the wheel after they've created the problem. Meanwhile grocery prices and the cost of living are going up, up, up. Thousands of families make the minimum wage in Alberta, and they're still living below the poverty line, and they are unable to lift themselves out of poverty. Alberta will lose its status as an economic powerhouse if workers here cannot afford the basics. This government must increase the minimum wage. To the Premier: when will this government protect Alberta's economy by ensuring our lowest paid workers get a desperately overdue pay raise?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we want to make sure that we address this carefully. There are only 5.2 per cent of people within Alberta at the minimum wage. That means everybody else, 95 per cent of employees in Alberta, is making more than that. So while we want to address those who are most affected, that 5 per cent, we want to make sure that they keep their jobs. If we raise it too high, like the NDP did, the result is that they lose their jobs, hardly helping in this situation. This is a conversation we're having carefully with those who are employed and those who are employers to make sure that we get it right.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we're now at question 5, which means no preamble on supplementaries. But I know no one was going to do that anyways.

Emergency Medical Services

Ms Hoffman: While campaigning the current Premier promised that she'd protect public health care, and she actually said she'd fix it in 90 days. Well, I've yet to find a single Albertan across this province who believes that it's any better than it was when the UCP formed government. In fact, many come up to me daily telling me how much worse it is. Now we have the data to back that up, revealing through a freedom of information and privacy request that that is true. Will the minister of hospitals admit that under UCP government policy things have gone from reliable, with room to improve, to disastrous?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud of the work of our health care professionals to provide world-class health care to Albertans. We know that with a rapidly growing population that is aging and presenting as more complex, there are pressures on our hospitals. That's why we're going to be coming forward with the acute-care action plan, which will include immediate investments to stabilize and support the acute-care health hospital system and a long-term plan to guide our work so that we build a system that's sustainable for years to come.

Ms Hoffman: Given the government's own data shows that emergency departments in Alberta were closed for more than 34,000 hours last year alone and of those emergency departments that were actually open, nearly 200,000 Albertans gave up before they even got to see a doctor – the overworked emergency departments were so out of control. Will the minister for hospitals admit that things haven't improved, and will he actually work with the front-line staff to fix the problem? Or will he continue with the Conservative tradition of blaming others like front-line doctors, health care workers, and others who just want to do their jobs?

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, we are accountable for the hospital system in Alberta. That is why we are refocusing, and we'll be making the investments necessary to bring it to the standards that Albertans expect and that health care professionals have asked for. Emergency department wait times are too long, and the left-without-being-seen rate is too high. These are problems seen all across Canada, but the difference is that you're going to see action in Alberta to resolve those. We're going to build the in-patient capacity so that patients can flow from emergency departments into hospital beds, and you're going to see wayfinding for patients so that they find the most appropriate care in a hospital or outside a hospital.

Ms Hoffman: Given that under the UCP the number of Calgarians who have left the emergency department before even seeing a

doctor has more than doubled – it's now at 57,000, Mr. Speaker – and given that in Edmonton that number is even higher – 75,000 patients left the emergency department untreated – and given that various UCP ministers have tried to blame AHS or Covenant or doctors or nurses, the buck stops with the minister. Emergency access has declined under the UCP. Will the minister of hospitals stand in this place and commit to finally building the new south Edmonton hospital that's so desperately needed and staff it properly?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the reasons why emergency departments are facing extreme pressure is because of a decline in acute-care capacity per population; in other words, fewer beds today than 10 years ago because Alberta has seen rapid population growth. The answer to this is to build acute-care capacity, and the acute-care plan includes over 1,000 acute-care spaces, two bed towers in Edmonton, around 700 beds to alleviate these pressures. We're also adding physicians, including emergency department physicians. We added 700 year over year, and we're not done.

Thank you.

Technology Innovations in Agriculture

Mrs. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's mission is to lead in technology and innovation, and that leadership is transforming every sector, including agriculture. As our farmers continue to feed an increasing population with decreasing arable land, technology is more important than ever. Western Crop Innovations, supported by this government, is advancing the ag industry by developing new crops like awnless triticale and the first Canadian-bred non-GMO barley. To the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation: what is this government doing to support ongoing research and innovation in the grain industry?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture.

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Of course, Alberta's farmers and ranchers have always been innovators, and our government is proud to support them in leading the next generation of ag research. Through initiatives like Results Driven Agriculture Research, Alberta is investing over \$37 million annually into producer-led innovation. As the member had mentioned in her question, partnerships with organizations like Western Crop Innovations are advancing made-in-Alberta solutions that strengthen food security and competitiveness. We're ensuring that Alberta remains a world leader in agricultural innovation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that pests like gophers do enormous damage to arable land every year, threatening livestock through hazardous pasture conditions and destroying large acres of growing crops and given that innovative, essential tools are needed to combat these threats to prevent the loss of crop and cattle, once again to the minister: what technological innovations are available and worth considering when advocating for these needs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Protecting our farmland and livestock from destructive pests is critical. I want to

talk about Ottawa's non science based ban on strychnine. They did this without meaningful consultation, and it's left our producers without an effective tool to control gophers. We now have tens of thousands of acres of destroyed crops and grazing lands. That's why this government, led by myself, has submitted an emergency-use application for 2 per cent strychnine on ag lands. The federal government needs to do the right thing and let producers protect their land, livestock, and livelihoods.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again through you to the minister for that answer. Given that Alberta's cattle industry is a cornerstone of our agricultural economy and given that global demand for Alberta beef continues to grow, which creates pressure to increase innovation in livestock management, to the minister: how is this ministry supporting cattle producers in adopting new innovations to improve herd health, productivity, and environmental sustainability?

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta's cattle industry leads the world in quality, innovation, and environmental stewardship, and our government is ensuring that it stays that way for generations to come. We're investing in research, genetics, and feed efficiency while also supporting improved grazing management through programs like the resilient agricultural landscape program, which rewards producers for their sustainable practices. We're also supporting producers to adopt new technologies, from RFID tagging and precision feeding to traceability systems, everything that improves herd health to help maintain Alberta beef as the best in the world.

Alberta Separatism and Economic Development

Member Batten: Mr. Speaker, Albertans watched their grocery bills climb and their paycheques shrink while this government toured around pretending separatism is an economic strategy. Their so-called Alberta Next road show has been disastrous for investor confidence and for families struggling just to keep up. Every mile of their tour was another reminder that the UCP would rather spew separatist rhetoric than do their job to grow the Alberta economy. When will the minister of jobs, economy and trade start welcoming investment and jobs to our province rather than chasing it away with separatist rhetoric?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, this government is proud of the fact that we listen to Albertans when it comes to the Alberta Next Panel. We're not afraid of it; in fact, we believe that if you don't listen to them, that will drive wedges into our society like the NDP would like to see. As far as spewing rhetoric, members opposite know too much about that. On the other hand, in the regal voice of the throne speech Albertans heard our government say that we believe "in a strong, free, and sovereign Alberta within a united Canada." Sovereignty does not mean separation. We are proud patriots on this side of the aisle. We love Canada; our heart can also love Alberta just as much.

Member Batten: Given that Albertans can't afford another year of uncertainty and given that the separatist theatrics do not pay the bills nor attract a single investor and given that the Alberta Next tour put Albertans last with families struggling to stretch every dollar while the UCP burned through tax money chasing applause instead of jobs and given that their posturing has shaken the confidence, raised borrowing costs, and left businesses anxious for stability, when will this minister stop the touring and slogans and start governing for the people footing the bill?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's important to point out in last month's job growth statistics that Alberta created 42,000 jobs, 70 per cent of all the jobs created in Canada. While we know that month to month those job numbers can fluctuate, over the last few years since 2019, since that government departed, thankfully, we've created 300,000 jobs here in Alberta, leading the nation. Job attraction, investment attraction live here in Alberta. We're proud of that, and we're working to make it even better.

Member Batten: Given that strong economies start with strong classrooms but given that this UCP government forced students and educators to return to unsafe, overcrowded classrooms and given that this government diverted precious resources into separation threats that frightened away capital and stifled opportunity and given that the use of the notwithstanding clause to go after people's rights is another form of political instability, will the minister admit that separatist rhetoric, underfunding public education, and political instability will do nothing to bring jobs or prosperity to our province?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, the rhetoric on the other side of the House is driving Albertans mad. The truth is that the notwithstanding clause is an important tool. If we look at recent Supreme Court decisions... [interjections] Members opposite laugh, but child pornography and exploiting children are no laughing matter. We believe firmly on this side of the House that the notwithstanding clause is there so that the elected officials... [interjections]

The Speaker: Whoa, members. The minister is only about three paces from me, and I couldn't hear his answer. We heard the question. Let's hear the answer, too, even if we don't like the answer.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, this side of the House as government will not take the side of child pornographers. We think the notwithstanding clause is an important tool, and if members opposite want to laugh about the important role legislators have in our democratic process, I suggest you all quit and get jobs as judges. Until then, this House thinks we should be using the notwithstanding clause when it's called for. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Compensation for Pharmacy Services

Member Kayande: Mr. Speaker, it's that time of year when the first snow falls, the leaves turn brown, and pharmacists' payment caps hit our health care system. Pharmacists may have to meet with patients multiple times to manage diabetes insulin, for example, and that work is unpaid. Despite population growth brought about by this government's Alberta Is Calling move-in bonuses, pharmacists' payment caps haven't changed in seven years. Why does this government expect pharmacists to pay the price of this government's health care failures?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to say that our pharmacists have the greatest scope of practice of anywhere in Canada. It's why we have more pharmacists per capita than anywhere else in Canada. We are continually reviewing the payment with the RxA, which is the association that represents the pharmacists, making sure that they are in fact paid appropriately for

the work that they do. That's a continual process that we go through on an ongoing basis, and we continue to do that each and every year.

Member Kayande: Mr. Speaker, given that this government is happy to talk about pharmacists' scope of practice but does nothing to enable pharmacists to practise their full scope economically and given that one of the many health care failures caused by this government is the 1 million Albertans without a family doctor, leaving the neighbourhood pharmacist as the only health provider, why won't this government sit down with pharmacists to pay them for the work that they do?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're going to continue to pay our pharmacists well because they are, in fact, one of the important members of the primary care team. I'm happy to tell the member opposite that we have seen extreme growth in all our workforce areas. As of September 30 we have 12,769 physicians registered to practise in the province. That's in comparison to when they were in office, which was only 10,600 at max. We continue to have more nurses, nurse practitioners, paramedics, et cetera.

Member Kayande: Given that this government's antiscientific obsession with fake health scares like chemtrails, electromagnetic allergies, and antivax conspiracy means actual health care challenges like measles, flu, and COVID go unaddressed, Mr. Speaker, and given that this government's botched rollout of COVID vaccines means pharmacists are left explaining failed UCP government policies they themselves haven't had communicated to them, why is this government making pharmacists an accessory to their weird vision of public health rather than treating them like partners deserving respect?

2:20

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, there was nothing in what the member opposite said that resembles accuracy. In fact, as of October 31 we've had over 171,825 COVID vaccines administered to Albertans. This is very comparable to where we were last year at this time. In terms of the COVID vaccines that are being administered through pharmacy, they are private COVID vaccines, and those are sourced by the pharmacists themselves.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Crime and Public Safety

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Scrap metal related crime, particularly copper wire and catalytic converter theft, is on the rise in Alberta, with repeat offenders causing damage and distress in constituencies across our province. Police face new investigative challenges, and justice seems elusive for victims. Can the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services please explain to this Assembly how the government is working with law enforcement to prevent copper wire and catalytic converter theft?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier and minister of public safety.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member is indeed correct. The Liberal-NDP alliance in Ottawa has allowed organized crime to thrive in the country of Canada. The rising tide of scrap metal, particularly copper wire, is not just a property crime; it directly attacks our critical infrastructure as well as our public safety. We are giving police the tools that they need to track stolen

property, swiftly prosecute offenders, and, of course, shut down the illicit market. Justice will be swift, and security will be restored.

The Speaker: The Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that Albertans are frustrated by the lack of consequences for criminals and further given the increase in repeat vehicle break-ins and the damage caused to both personal property and businesses as a result of these crimes, can the Minister of Justice please explain to this Assembly what changes our government is making to strengthen the justice system's response and ensure that offenders receive appropriate penalties and are held accountable for their disruptive criminal behaviour?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We know that for far too long criminals have been running rampant in this province, and we know that it's owing primarily to the catch-and-release system of the federal government. To improve public safety, we've made 34 court appointments thus far. We have historically low numbers in our Crown prosecution service. [interjections] I hear the members of the opposition chirping. If only they chirped so loudly when the recent Supreme Court decision not holding child pornographers to account was made, our province would have been better off.

The Speaker: The Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given the emotional and financial toll vehicle break-ins have on victims, many Albertans feel that their concerns are overlooked while offenders face minimal consequences and further given that Albertans are asking for enhancements to victim compensation programs or legal mechanisms that would ensure offenders are held financially accountable for the damage they cause to vehicles, homes, and businesses, can the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services explain to this Assembly what our government is doing to hold offenders to account and to financially compensate them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of public safety.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Despite what the members opposite believe, victims actually do have rights as well. To every victim in Alberta the government has an unwavering commitment, the victims of the crime assistance program. This will always be something that is dedicated to you. We have fundamentally reformed this system, and we're also rebuilding a robust, consistent, and reliable victims' services network to ensure help is there for every Albertan.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge has the floor.

Crime Prevention in South Asian Community

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, extortion, arson, and firebombings are terrorizing Canadian families and business owners across Alberta. This violence is escalating, so why has this government failed to act? The administration of justice and sourcing law enforcement are provincial responsibilities. This government must stop ignoring the crisis and start protecting Albertans. Does this government understand the lives at risk, or is

this just another example of this UCP government abandoning communities like ours?

Mr. Ellis: A few cents short of a dollar here, I guess, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that we have been on top of this issue since day one. We have been working with the federal government. I want to thank Minister Anandasangaree because it was this government that went to him and said the Bishnoi gang should be declared a terrorist organization, and less than 10 days later the federal government declared the Bishnoi gang a terrorist organization. We have met with members who are victims of the Bishnoi gang, and we'll continue to keep Albertans safe.

The Speaker: I know the Deputy Premier knows not to mention names in here, but we'll say that will be that.

The hon. member.

Member Boparai: Thank you. Given that law enforcement is overwhelmed and the community has called for a special prosecutor and given that this government shamefully keeps pointing fingers and fails to provide real leadership and given that this government is all bark and no bite when it comes to protecting Albertans and given that lives are at risk, how long will this government keep delaying justice for these Albertans? Or will they just get more weakness and cowardice from this government?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the hon. member for the question. The fact of the matter is that both the public safety minister and I have met with members of the community impacted by extortion here in Alberta. We've met with police chiefs. We've met with the Crown prosecution service. We've allocated specific resources to combatting this issue. I didn't see that member meeting with members of the community when we were there with the police chiefs of Calgary and Edmonton talking about this particular issue. We have dedicated prosecutors and police officers working round the clock to combat extortion.

Member Boparai: Given that families are being targeted and businesses destroyed, does this government truly believe it can stand by while communities suffer? Given that public safety is being neglected by this government and given that this UCP government only acts when they think it benefits them rather than ensuring those in your communities, especially recent immigrants, are safe, how many more lives and businesses need to be ruined? What is the price our communities must pay?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that we've been working very closely with the South Asian community. It was this government that co-ordinated meeting between people of both Edmonton and Calgary with the Edmonton and Calgary police services. I can tell you that in the South Asian community it is actually NDP policies that have put the people at risk. It's the soft-on-crime policies, the fact that they have not been able to support law enforcement for the last decade. I can tell you that on this side of the House we're going to continue to keep Albertans safe, and the South Asian community knows that. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Only the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont has the floor.

Long-term and Continuing Care Spaces

Mr. Lundy: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's hospitals continue to face high demand with many acute-care beds being

occupied by patients who no longer require that level of care. Given this challenge, can the Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services please explain what our government is doing to prioritize the development of alternate level of care beds and what specific strategies are being implemented to ensure a timely, effective, and sustainable transition for patients into more appropriate, cost-effective care environments?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the things that we did learn was that, unfortunately, Alberta Health Services was not even tracking capacity when it came to the continuing care capacity inside our province. We've worked over the last 60 days to be able to track all capacity in the province and been able to make two determinations: first, how we can surge capacity with the existing capacity that exists in Alberta – that's taking place right now – and to use as the base point for a long-term capital plan that will be announced in the next couple of days. Here's the good news. ALCs are down across the province by 20 per cent, something, unfortunately, the NDP could never have dreamed of, but this government is not going to stop. I can promise you that.

The Speaker: Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. Given that receiving the right care in the right place is a shared responsibility and given that sustainably increasing the capacity of alternate level of care beds requires strong community co-operation, can the same minister please outline how the ministry is working with stakeholders to develop long-term care options and how this collaboration will ensure vulnerable Albertans receive timely and appropriate care outside of acute hospital settings?

2:30

Mr. Nixon: Well, sadly, Mr. Speaker, underneath both NDP leadership and Alberta Health Services leadership we found things like this: 80 people last year living in acute care for over a thousand days each; combined together, for over 220 years. Almost 12,000-plus patients could have received acute care. I'm happy to report to you that nowhere, anywhere in this province has anybody lived in acute care over a thousand days; shortly over 300 days. That's real accomplishment. We're going to continue to make sure it gets done.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lundy: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister. Given that Albertans deserve to know that investments in alternate level of care beds are paying off and given that accountability is essential to maintaining public trust in our health system, can the same minister please outline how performance will be measured, what benchmarks are being used to track improvements, and what progress has been made so far towards achieving the goals of the alternate level of care initiative?

Mr. Nixon: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, Alberta Health Services underneath the NDP leadership did not even make a capital plan for continuing care. That's why they couldn't get any houses built, and evidently they couldn't get any continuing care capacity built. That's why we've taken apart AHS, brought control of this issue into our department. I'm happy to report that shortly we will announce the largest continuing care capital program in the history of the province. In the meantime we continue to surge capacity in new units across the province, resulting in a 20 per cent reduction in ALCs all across Alberta.

Support for Immigrants

Member Tejada: This government's approach to immigration policy is a study in cognitive dissonance. Last year's multimillion-dollar Alberta Is Calling campaign asked people to move here, but those who heeded the call face sky-high insurance rates, increasing housing costs, and lagging wages, and anyone identifying as a visible minority will now be on the receiving end of hate thanks to this government's repeated anti-immigrant dog whistles. Can the Associate Minister of Multiculturalism tell us why they set a table for 10, invited a hundred, and blamed everyone who showed up?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year's Alberta Is Calling targeted specifically the skilled trades that were needed to build the homes that the members opposite have been asking about in this question period. They are needed to build the hospitals the members opposite are asking about. They're needed to build all of the infrastructure that Albertans count on to get themselves to work and their families where they need to go. That's what that campaign did. It was laser targeted at skilled trades, where we're projecting tens of thousands of shortages, to build the billion-dollar petrochemical and other construction projects that create jobs for Albertans.

Member Tejada: Given that the Alberta Next panels were a prime example of how the UCP would rather point fingers than solve problems, blaming immigrants rather than plan and invest for growth, and given that the Alberta Next videos on immigration were so full of disinformation that the Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies had to put out a fact-checking document disputing the anti-immigrant rhetoric, has the minister bothered to consult with immigrant-serving agencies to discuss solutions rather than just paint immigrants as the problem?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think it's an important question to be asked, and I think it's one that we have to take time to answer. Well, obviously, the federal government is in charge of all of Canada's immigration, and we've seen that they have completely lost control of that over the last 10 years. Alberta does continue to advocate and work with the federal government as to how many of those immigrants land within Alberta so that we can accomplish housing them, employing them, and seeing that their best attributes investing in our economy are met for their success and Albertans' success. We continue to do that work with the federal government, but when they overwhelm the system across the country, we all suffer.

Member Tejada: Given that picking fights is not co-operation and their Alberta Next Panel suggestion that discrimination on delivery of services may actually result in costly legal action and given that the UCP could invest in affordable housing, health care, and education but instead blame wait times and overcrowded classrooms on immigrants and given that this government will twist itself into knots to sow division rather than serve Albertans here and now – that includes immigrants, Mr. Speaker – when will the minister stop blaming people and actually start helping people thrive?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of assisted living and seniors.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Lots to unpack in that question, but I'll focus on housing, which shows one of the great

co-operations from the Alberta government and the federal Canadian government, which has resulted in Alberta having the most homes built, both market and affordable, anywhere in the country, resulting in rent going down in Calgary, Edmonton, and all across Alberta, resulting in Alberta having seven of the 10 most affordable jurisdictions anywhere in Canada right here because of the work that takes place in Alberta. We bet on Albertans. The NDP bet against Albertans, but this side of the House will continue to bet on Alberta each and every day. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Education Funding

Mr. Ellingson: Mr. Speaker, this government just pushed back-to-work legislation for Alberta's teachers. Their argument is that they did it for the students, but their funding decisions contradict that. Budget decisions have been clearly made below population growth and inflation. How does the Minister of Finance believe that school boards are to keep up with both the cost of increasing enrolment and escalating costs for building operation and maintenance when the budget intentionally funds public schools at levels below those increases?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that question because not only was it largely about funding of a specific department, but it also mentions the budgeting process. That's what we need to talk about in this place, priorities. There is only so much money in Alberta. As you've seen, the priorities from our government have mainly been focused around health care and education at two levels. It absolutely engulfs most of the operational spending of our province, and we need to continue to have those conversations through the budget process. It will continue to be a very high priority.

Mr. Ellingson: Given that this government chose to implement a three-year rolling average for funding and given that this decision left rapidly growing school boards to absorb thousands of new students without any additional funding to handle the growth and given that this has contributed to overcrowding of classrooms, forcing our school cafeterias, gymnasiums, and even hallways to be used as learning spaces, will the Minister of Finance admit to teachers and parents that he consciously chose to create classroom conditions that drove teachers to strike?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of education.

Mr. Nicolaidis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, a lot of that was not quite accurate. The government moved away very recently from a three-year model of funding education to a two-year model in direct response to some of the challenges that we were seeing and to reply directly to many of the questions or requests that we were receiving from school boards. In addition, we did also have the supplemental enrolment growth grant. That was an additional top-up grant provided to some of our fastest growing school divisions.

Mr. Ellingson: Given that the team that negotiates with public-sector unions, including the Teachers' Association, sits in Treasury Board and Finance and given that the minister has stated here in this House that the government simply doesn't have the funds for the teachers' demands, will the minister admit to everyone today that he is responsible for Alberta having the lowest per capita funding per student in the country and that he is responsible for the state of Alberta's public education?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of the way our government has bargained with the public sector. Let me tell you why. [interjections] Let me tell you why. Oil is currently at \$61. I heard the members opposite talk about when they had to give zeros to the public service and it was because they couldn't afford it. We're forecasting a 6 and a half billion dollar deficit at Q1, which no doubt has deteriorated, and still we are coming forward with the largest salary increases the public service has seen in two decades. [interjections] You know why? It's the right thing to do. We don't want retention and recruitment challenges.

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's time for us to only hear from the Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Highway 28 Capital Plan

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, highway 28 is a vital transportation corridor for northeast Alberta, and my constituents must be able to depend on its safety. The recent improvements between highway 63 in Waskatenau and the roundabout at highway 831 show that this government of Alberta recognizes highway 28's importance. To the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors: will you please inform this Assembly how our government plans to continue investing in highway 28 to further improve safety for all Albertans?
2:40

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

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much to the member for that very important question on highway 28. I'm happy to report that upcoming work on highway 28 includes 12 intersection upgrades, six climbing and passing lanes, three new rest areas, and a roundabout at Smoky Lake. These are all great examples of this government investing in rural Alberta. Transportation and Economic Corridors' budget is \$3.4 billion every year. Something that I'm proud to see: all the projects, including highway 28, on that list.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that response. Given that Budget 2025 includes funding towards highway 28 and further given that this funding reflects our government's ongoing commitment to improve the efficiency and safety of this vital route for both the residents and industry, to the same minister: what additional projects are planned for highway 28 within the constituency of Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock, and how will these projects continue to benefit all Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. transportation minister.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, highway 28 carries more than 5,000 vehicles per day, and that's why our government is investing over \$18 million to upgrade certain intersections, drainage improvements, curve realignments, and resurfacing work between Waskatenau and highway 63. We're all trying to work on these projects that are very important to people in that region, not only for the economics of that region but also so families can get home safely.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that highway 28 has been the subject of long-term planning and Albertans are hard-working people who depend on our roads and therefore rely on

predictable timelines for road upgrades and given that the corridor is essential for regional transportation and economic activity, to the same minister: what is the projected timeline for this work, and how will this ensure the highway remains safe, efficient, and dependable for residents in my constituency?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Design work is well under way for that 25-kilometre stretch of highway, and once the design and land acquisition are complete, we'll be able to move on construction very quickly, something that we've now done in Calgary with the green line, which I know the Leader of the Opposition is very well informed of. When you actually design something, you want to have the construction follow it right away. We're building the green line down in Calgary, and we'll be happy to build highway 28 here in Edmonton as well.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have one day without a point of order in question period. I fear I've just cursed myself.

Nonetheless, hon. members, you now have 30 seconds if you need to move, and then we'll get on with the completion of Members' Statements.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I rise only on Standing Order 7(8) to advise the House that it may be necessary to extend the daily Routine past 3 p.m. today.

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Food Prices and Affordability

Mrs. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are feeling the impact of higher prices at the grocery store, and our government understands how frustrating that is for families trying to make their budget stretch. It's important we look honestly at what's driving these costs.

There is a difference between gross and net revenues. Some have suggested record profits at grocery chains are evidence of unchecked greed. The truth is that those revenues reflect the full cost of our national food supply chain: paying our hard-working farmers and ranchers, transportation, storage, labour, utilities, and distribution across one of the largest land masses in the world. Those figures don't simply represent money in a CEO's pocket; they represent the cost of producing and delivering food in a global economy shaped by fuel costs, supply chain disruptions, and inflation pressures.

Mr. Speaker, our government is focused on solutions that make a real difference. We're investing in efficient transportation and irrigation infrastructure so Alberta-grown food can reach markets more affordably. We're reducing red tape for producers and processors to lower costs. Alberta supports the voluntary grocery sector code of conduct developed by industry for suppliers and grocers across Canada to smooth supplier-retailer relationships. This code helps smaller producers and independent grocers compete, giving Albertans more choice and better prices over time.

Let's be clear. Global food inflation is driven by weather events, energy prices, international trade tensions, and labour shortages, just to name a few. It is not realistic for government to simply legislate away these pressures. Our food system is complex and Alberta producers play a vital role in feeding not just our province but the entire world. Our government will keep working on

practical measures that strengthen local production, streamline supply chains, and keep Alberta's agriculture sector thriving. That's how we'll support affordability for families and ensure a reliable food supply for generations to come.

Health Care Workers

Ms Wright: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are speaking out about long wait times, unsafe conditions, and a health care system that is on the brink. Lorraine my constituent still waits for surgery, a child's chemotherapy was cancelled due to bed shortages, and people are sitting for hours in emergency rooms with sometimes life-threatening conditions. Paramedics are stretched thin, ambulances are unavailable, and hospital ERs are closing. Workers are telling us that the system is in crisis, but they're not just tired; they're burnt out and feel disrespected and ignored. Health care under this government is not available when and where you need it.

Instead of listening to the experts and front-line workers, this UCP government has dismissed their concerns, pushed privatization, and even demanded rollbacks. As my constituent Fiona says: paying out of pocket for health care isn't freedom and constantly worrying about paying for things isn't freedom.

HSAA members, paramedics, respiratory therapists, and diagnostic techs are sometimes so short-staffed that they are only operating at a half capacity. AUPE members face stagnant wages and crushing workloads, but every day these workers show up to do their jobs. This government's refocusing has brought chaos, not care, and that is on the UCP. They'd rather worry about designing new logos instead of fixing staffing shortages. They'd rather silence workers than listen.

Mr. Speaker, workers in this province deserve to be heard at the bargaining table, not silenced in this Legislature. It's time for the UCP to get back to that bargaining table and bargain in good faith, respect workers, pay them what they're worth, protect the future of health care in this province, and, while you're at it, repeal Bill 2.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. government Justice minister.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of the Government House Leader to give notice pursuant to Government Motion 4 that there will be no evening sitting today, Monday, November 3, 2025.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Childcare.

Bill 6

Education (Prioritizing Literacy and Numeracy) Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2)

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill, being the Education (Prioritizing Literacy and Numeracy) Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2).

Mr. Speaker, this bill will help ensure that our foundational learners receive the support and intervention that they need so that they can continue to develop into the strongest possible learners and adults.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A couple sets of tablings. The first are copies of the freedom of information and privacy request that I referred to today in question period. Paid a lot of money for this. All members can now read it for free.

Then the other piece is letters that I referred to in debate on Thursday afternoon for them to look them up in *Hansard*. Thank you, Ivy, Elliott, and Lucas, for their letters.

2:50

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

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five copies of an e-mail from Amanda, who is a very disappointed teacher from Drumheller.

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

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of two letters that I've received from constituents. My first tabling is from Charlene Gardner, who expressed her frustration with this government and the taking away of teacher bargaining rights.

My second tabling is from Lauren Hawes, a school principal who feels that teachers have not been respected and is opposed to the government's use of the notwithstanding clause.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I received hundreds of postcards in my office from teachers of my constituency, talking about the unbearable classroom conditions, and I have the five requisite copies.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for — I know the answer, but it's not coming to me here — Edmonton-West Henday.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings here. I have the requisite copies. One, an e-mail from a teacher who outlines what's gone on in the last 14 years in her career.

I also have a press release from chiefs of Alberta, Alberta's Proposed Water Act Amendment a Direct Affront to Treaty Rights and Environmental Stewardship.

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

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with two tablings. The first is a tabling that showcases that Fort McMurray has become only the third community in Canada to functionally end veterans' homelessness, and the other one is a Eurostat graph for net migration per 1,000 residents for 2023.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. I'll get around to everybody. Don't worry.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move to table Human Rights Council, Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The article is titled *Compilation of Conclusions and Recommendations from the United Nations Seminars on Treaties, Agreements and other Constructive Agreements*. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, did I see?

Ms Renaud: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of 10 different e-mails from constituents from St. Albert. Some are

teachers, some are parents, and they are very disappointed with this government.

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two different tablings. The first is in reference to Fiona, who I referred to in my member's statement today, and the second has to do with Suzanne's deep concern about the fast-tracking of Bill 2 the other day. Thank you.

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

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five requisite copies of handwritten letters from Megan Scheuring, J. Stroud, Jessie Trenholm, and Dominique Borrelli, begging the government to please treat LGBTQ people fairly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. I've got one tabling from a constituent in St. Albert, who raises concerns about the Kananaskis conservation pass and its implementation and is asking the minister why the jobs to implement it are being outsourced to the U.S.

The Speaker: Please don't read us the tabling. Just tell us the title.

Dr. Elmeligi: My apologies. It's hard to say this stuff fast.

The second is a letter from a constituent in my riding to the Premier and to the Governor General asking to repeal Bill 2.

The Speaker: Nobody has to say it fast. You just need to tell the title without going into editorial comment.

Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two e-mails, one from Rhiannon from Calgary and one from Matthew from rural Alberta. Both were quite interesting because both were long-time Conservatives and UCP members and are now upset due to the UCP's attacks on teachers.

The Speaker: Calgary-Acadia.

Member Batten: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table two different tablings with the requisite copies for a letter from a constituent from Calgary-Acadia, letters to the Premier expressing disgust with Bill 2, to constitutional rights being taken. My second one, very quickly, Mr. Speaker, is the requisite copies of a letter from a grade 6 teacher pleading with the government to take education seriously. Thank you.

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

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the five requisite copies of e-mails from two constituents, one expressing her extreme displeasure at the fast track of Bill 2 and the other from a school administrator begging the government to listen to teachers.

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

Ms Al-Guneid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I present the requisite copies of a letter from a teacher who describes the lack of funding and support from the government as creating the perfect environment for the issues seen in the classrooms.

Mr. Haji: I would like to table two letters, one from Terra from Airdrie, who's frustrated with access to COVID-19 vaccinations, as well as another one from Red Deer; they are having difficulties in terms of accessing COVID-19 vaccinations.

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

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a copy of an e-mail from a resident from Hinton expressing concern that the licence plate initiative is not a priority and the focus should be on teachers, health care, and supporting AISH.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite copies of three e-mails from constituents, Katie Lamoureux, Brenda Fridas, and Katie Stamm, who disagree with the licence plate changes made by the minister of transportation and say that the money should be spent on public education and health care.

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

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite copies of a letter from Jennifer and Jordan Nakaska, residents of Calgary-Hays, asking the government to repeal Bill 2.

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

Member Miyashiro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite copies of an e-mail from Amanda Hooker from Calgary, who's a parent who's very disappointed in this government and opposes the use of the notwithstanding clause.

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

Member Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two e-mails from constituents. The first is from Krista Lokseth, concerned about Bill 2 and what it's doing.

The second is from Catherine7159, and she is concerned about the defunding of public education.

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

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two different tablings today. My first is in reference to a question that was part of the question I used last week from Kaisa about Alberta being an economic driver and funding our schools. So thank you, Kaisa, for writing my office.

The Speaker: Could you just state the title, please.

Ms Hayter: Sorry. Yeah.

My second is an article by Jeremy Appel from October 31, 2025. It was on *Alberta Native News*, and it was just stating that Alberta cuts funding mid-year to programs for Indigenous mothers who have faced domestic violence.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: That second tabling was outstanding by the way.

Ms Hayter: Oh, was it? Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any others? Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling from Rob, who lives in my constituency and is an assistant principal with Edmonton public schools. Two concerns, constitutional

concerns with Bill 2 and deteriorating teaching and learning conditions.

The Speaker: Are there any other tablings? Seeing none.

Okay. This is the point where on not-so-great days we would do points of order, but there are none. So that takes us to points of privilege.

Hon. members, as you may recall, the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane raised a question of privilege on October 30, 2025. The government deferred its submission until today.

The Deputy Government House Leader, please proceed.

Privilege

Appointments to Assembly Committees

Obstructing a Member in Performance of Duty

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. While it is most often a pleasure to rise in the Assembly to speak to any issue in various questions in front of legislation, as it comes before us today it is distinct displeasure and unfortunate disappointment to have to rise.

Rising today, I'm speaking to a point of privilege. It is never in itself a cause for pleasure, whether in defence, as I do now, or whether it be in prosecution at that point. Nevertheless, the privileges granted to this Assembly and its members must be upheld, and in the name of such a cause I'm pleased to rise to defend the reputation of my honourable friend the Government House Leader.

The point of privilege was raised by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane, as it pertains to long-standing privilege held by members of the Assembly; that is, freedom from obstruction, interference, intimidation, and molestation; rights we're all afforded by virtue of our membership. Yet I do not see that the evidence suggests any breach of this member's privileges. Thus, as you, Mr. Speaker, I have been pleased to allow and shall endeavour to lay out several substantive rebuttals in the remainder of my remarks to exactly this effect.

First, in observing the hon. member's attempt to call a point of privilege. Though it unfortunate, with a lack of formality in the process, generally points of privilege are raised by informing your office, Mr. Speaker, of one's intent to do so by doing so in actuality following the daily Routine but before Orders of the Day, as outlined in Standing Order 15(2). However, points of privilege may also be raised immediately following the perpetration, as outlined in that same order 15(5). It is my belief that neither of these circumstances are the case with regard to the point of privilege raised by the hon. member.

3:00

What is more, Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 15(6) as well as the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, on page 142 clarifies that points of privilege "must be raised at the earliest opportunity," and I do not believe that to be the case either, especially with regard to the member's concerns about intimidation. So it is clear that the point of privilege does not qualify under Standing Order 15(2), and it is difficult to argue that it qualifies under Standing Order 15(5) and problematic to argue and suggest that it was raised at "the earliest opportunity," as we heard in the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*.

Now, were we to lay aside those concerns for a moment, which the government does not do, nevertheless it bears noting that the member faced some difficulties in raising the point of privilege. Four times he was interrupted for failing to speak to the motion on the floor, and each time he responded with thinly veiled frustrations directed towards your dais, Mr. Speaker. Would that the member

have raised his point of privilege immediately upon rising, he would doubtless have been afforded the time without interruptions. Yet I have empathy for the member's nascent understanding of the standing orders, and I'm aware that the member is just now taking interest in the member's rights and privileges, and this is undoubtedly a good thing.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, I would now proceed to make a defence against the accusations and concerns of the hon. member, which had two natures, and I will thus address in two different parts. First, I shall address his accusation of intimidation, followed by his accusation of obstruction and interference through the motion itself. Despite the disorganization of the member's comments and the challenge to ascertain the true intent given that in his failure to indicate immediately that he was moving a point of privilege, it is clear that he was attempting to accuse the Government House Leader, the Member for Cardston-Siksika of intimidation.

Now, it is difficult to discern the reasoning of these accusations that were brought forward as they bear no relevance to the point of privilege being dealt with today as they are precluded from aforementioned provisions, being made not at the earliest opportunity. In fact, they were made not on Thursday but more than five months previous. I want to state that these accusations are categorically false and indeed of a vexatious nature, however, Mr. Speaker, as I outlined, not relevant due to the timing of when they were brought up. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that the accusation was made that the Government House Leader, quote, unbuttoned his coat and suggested that I, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane, might want to take my words outside. Unquote. This can be found in *Hansard* on May 13 of this year.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Speaker of the day said the following when the point of order was called on the matter. "No part of me believes [that] a physical threat was made." Moreover, it was said on that day that "a point of privilege and a contempt has not been called here, simply a point of order, which I think is appropriate in this case." Regardless, the Government House Leader did apologize for his remarks on the matter, and the matter was considered dealt with and concluded by the Speaker of the day, your predecessor.

One item does bear noting. The topic of unbuttoning a jacket did not even receive a mention during the Speaker's ruling, understandably. In the interest of utmost clarity, however, and with the aim of providing the Government House Leader's complete innocence, I wish to make several comments on the matter of unbuttoning a jacket. Firstly, if you were to watch the recordings of the event, you would see quickly that there was nothing aggressive about the manner in which the Government House Leader unbuttoned his suit jacket. It is evidence to most that he was simply unbuttoning his jacket in anticipation of retaining a sedentary position, as is normal in sartorial wear, as we do, but temporarily was interrupted from taking his seat by additional arguments, and he wished to share with the Assembly.

Secondly, the opposition's ignorance or at least disregard for royal and sartorial tradition is made clear by his complaint. What I mean to say, Mr. Speaker – and this is an interesting point to be made – is that the habitual buttoning and unbuttoning of suit jackets as demonstrated by the Government House Leader is merely an homage to King Edward VII, who inadvertently dictated the proper approach to buttoning one's jacket both when he sought to pay respects to the suit's predecessor, the jacket's predecessor, the riding jacket, and when he ceased to button the bottom button of the waistcoat due to his encroaching waistline.

All of that to say, Mr. Speaker, is simply to make a point that the accusations of intimidation based on the events of May 13, 2025, are nothing but frivolous and vexatious, as we can all hear with a note of hilarity that members are laughing in the Chamber. I can

only conclude that the member engaged in an attempt to paint the Government House Leader in a negative light by accusing him of microaggressions in this manner with the suit jacket. If members were to constantly go down such a path, we would find the Assembly locked in an absolute literal paralysis, where no member would be able to speak or rise or sit without fear of retribution. In this regard I must admit that the member has accomplished his goal of having a drive-by smear on the Government House Leader, unfortunately. These sorts of gimmicks border on media stunts, with an aim of creating bad press. To put the sentiment briefly, I have oft seen articles describing that in raising points of privilege, rarely does one see reporting on a matter of a point of privilege when it comes to unbuttoning jackets.

I continue, Mr. Speaker, on more substantive points here. The hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane has, however, represented another accusation, which is not, at first glance, disqualified by that same timeline concern that we outlined earlier. That is, of course, his argument that his appointment to the Standing Committee on Private Bills is a breach of his privilege, which he holds as a member of the Assembly. Let me be clear. There is undoubtedly an argument to be made that even these charges were not raised at the earliest opportunity, as the motion which would have appointed the member to the aforementioned committee appeared on the Order Paper days before raising the point of privilege.

On the other hand, one may also make the argument that the hon. member was pre-emptive in his point of privilege as the Assembly, the authoritative body on the matter, had not yet voted on the motion and therefore not yet appointed him to the committee and therefore made no attempt to impinge on, if that member's argument is held, his privileges. But I digress. The fundamental charge of the member's point of privilege is that the Government House Leader is guilty of abusing power by attempting to "impose the will of cabinet upon an independent member" and make the effort to interfere with the member's duties and freedoms as a Member of the Legislative Assembly.

In the first place it must be stated that the Government House Leader is clearly not abusing his power. A motion reassigning committee membership is standard practice in this body at the beginning of a session and occasionally in the midst of one. This motion is generally introduced by the Government House Leader, is frequently subject to no debate at all, and, of course, has historically appointed independent members to various committees throughout this Legislature's history.

It should, additionally, be noted that this is not the first time an independent member has taken issue with a committee appointment. As the chair may remember, in April 2018 both Mr. Clark and Mr. Fildebrandt felt slighted by the Government House Leader of the day, Mr. Brian Mason. Today I feel rather fitting to ask, as the Speaker did on November 21, 2023, "what would Brian Mason do?" And I believe I can say with some confidence that were he here in our shoes on this side of the bench, Mr. Mason would say, Mr. Speaker: "We have worked very hard to strike the right balance in terms of the members of the opposition. One of the things, of course, that's changed is the composition and the size of the opposition." That was on April 12, 2018, on page 530 of *Hansard*.

The current House leadership has likewise worked to strike the right balance, and this is laid out in Standing Order 52(4), "The composition of the membership of the committees established under this Standing Order must be proportionate to the number of seats held by each party in the Assembly," and (5), "The proportionate membership of committees as prescribed under suborder (4) may be varied by an agreement among all House Leaders."

Thankfully, in 2018, Mr. Speaker, the independent members were more experienced in their position, and an attempt was made to put an amendment before the Assembly, which unfortunately we did not see here, which is certainly a more realistic and reasonable method than the one pursued in this point of privilege by the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane. I do not believe that if he had raised his concerns by amendment, we would have to be found here today with this less effective avenue.

Moving to the second charge, Mr. Speaker, I fear the member is under the false impression that cabinet assigns him to one of the Assembly committees. This is undeniably not true and would be usurping the authority of this Chamber. This is not the case. Rather, when in due time a motion appointing members to a committee comes before the Assembly, the Assembly may carry out its will, and it is therefore the Assembly itself which appoints members to its own committees. This is laid out in the Standing Orders under 52(3). "The Assembly must determine the membership of the committees established under this Standing Order by resolution." Additionally, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, on page 1027 says, "It is the House, and the House alone, that appoints the members . . . of its committees . . . The Speaker has ruled that this is a fundamental right of the House." An interesting point may be made here, being that parliamentary authority suggests that the member is actually bound by the Assembly to serve on the committee to which he is appointed.

3:10

To quote Maingot, *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, pages 134, 135, and 156: Parliament has the paramount right to the attendance and service of its members, unquote, and, quote, Parliament has first called upon the attendance and service of its members, unquote, and, quote, every member is bound to attend the service of the House. Unquote. This privilege of the Assembly, the right to have the attendance and service of its members, extends to the Assembly's committees, as said on pages 34 and 33 of Maingot. Quote: a committee of either House of Parliament is an arm of the House because it derives its existence and its authority from the House. Unquote. Maingot refers to committees as proceedings of the House in the following line in that same text on page 34.

To be brief, I may quote *Erskine May's Parliamentary Practice*, 38.5, which reads, "A Member cannot be relieved [of] their obligation to obey the commands of the House by declining to serve on a committee." In essence, Mr. Speaker, this is the job. Serving in the Assembly and its relevant subsequent committees is the reason we are elected to serve. If the hon. member is hesitant to carry out his obligations in that manner, it is a conversation between him and his constituency, but it remains that the Assembly has appointed him to the committee, and he was elected to a position wherein he owes the Assembly his service.

Proceeding, then, to the last charge, the Government House Leader can hardly be accused of obstructing the member's duties and freedoms when it is, in fact, the Assembly which has given him the duty to serve on the Standing Committee on Private Bills. In other words, Mr. Speaker, we possess many freedoms and privileges as members in this House and Assembly, but on occasion the freedoms and privileges of the Assembly trump our own as individuals. The hon. member may have the privilege to attend proceedings of the Assembly unobstructed, but the Assembly has the privilege to appoint him to a committee and require him to serve thereupon.

As a final note, Mr. Speaker, it bears mentioning that when informed of the forthcoming appointment, the hon. member did not take any time prior, during, or subsequent to delivering his remarks to provide any alternatives to that, noting which he preferred. That

being the case, I'm left to draw the conclusion that he'd rather not be bothered to serve on the committee at this time. However, he is of course always welcome to resign should he wish to cease serving on the committee.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote once more the indefatigable Mr. Brian Mason, who encouraged dejected and downtrodden independent members with the following words. "I will say that we have proposed adding that hon. member to the [Private Bills] Committee, which is a very important committee . . . I'm sure that he's going to bring very valuable insight and make a great contribution to that committee." And with this, the government, on behalf of the Government House Leader, rests its case in defence of this vexatious point of privilege.

The Speaker: Hon. member that moved the point of privilege, your time to speak was in the previous day. There is no further time to speak today. That's the custom here.

Are there any other submissions? Seeing none.

In that event, hon. members, a point of privilege is a serious matter, and I intend to take some time to consider it, and I will be back another day, I expect this week. It might even be tomorrow. After carefully considering the matter, the precedents, the arguments, and the situation as I understand it now and come to understand it better, perhaps after spending some time carefully considering this, the matter will come back at a future date.

Now, hon. members, following the amendments made to the standing orders last week by Government Motion 10, a replacement page for your standing orders printed on green paper has been placed on each of your desks. The updated standing orders will be distributed to you at a later date.

Finally, hon. members, before we move into Orders of the Day, I wanted to take the opportunity to remind all members that in advance of Remembrance Day the Legislative Assembly of Alberta is encouraging everyone to wear a poppy as an enduring symbol of remembrance for those who are serving, have served, or fell in service of Canada. For your convenience there's a poppy box in the Speaker's office.

Orders of the Day

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

Bill 201 Employment Standards (Protecting Workers' Pay) Amendment Act, 2025

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much. I am incredibly pleased to rise and speak to Bill 201, protecting workers' paycheques. I think it's worth setting the context here.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

The first thing worth talking about is the fact that affordability is an absolutely critical issue here in Alberta. Affordability is driven by two pieces. It's driven by, yes, an increase in costs, absolutely, unquestionably. But it is also driven by stagnant wages. The actual problem here isn't just how much the cost of a house has increased over the last 30 years or how much the cost of rent has increased over the last two years. The issue is also that wages have remained relatively flat during those times, Mr. Speaker, in particular wages for the lowest earners.

In Alberta we used to have the highest earnings by far in the country. That has eroded significantly under the UCP government for various reasons, some having to do with the government.

Particularly for workers who are earning below the median, 50 per cent and below, that has eroded. Average wages relative to average costs have come down significantly such that in the time we're standing in now, most people under 30 will tell you that they don't expect to own a house ever. That dream that has been with us for so long doesn't exist for our young people anymore.

Mr. Speaker, I think we are in a position where we must do absolutely everything that we can. Despite these issues with affordability and despite the fact that the average salary of an 18- to 25-year-old has barely budged in the last 30 years and that relative to house prices, that are something like six or seven times what they were – people can't afford their lives. Does minimum wage affect all of those people? Certainly it does not, but it is something that is within the control of this Legislature. This is a piece of the problem that we can do something about right now.

Mr. Speaker, the real problem here is that we have a UCP government who is doing absolutely nothing about this problem. At a time when this is the absolute top issue for most Albertans, the only mention of affordability, the only mention of people's costs or their wages in this government's throne speech is to say that they'll maybe think about kind of slowing the rate of increase on electricity and insurance. That's it. They're not going to stop the increases. They're not going to cap them. They're not going to cap the increase, even. They're just going to slow down the rate of increase.

An Hon. Member: Maybe.

Ms Ganley: Maybe.

That's it. That's the only mention, and I really think that puts this government's entire agenda wildly out of touch with what is top of mind for Albertans.

This bill does three things. One of them is that it deals with the minimum wage, so let's start there. Alberta has the lowest minimum wage in the country. It has not gone up in seven years. At the same time inflation has been in double digits. That leaves these workers unable to afford the basics. Even assuming, you know, that there's no such thing as taxes, for roughly 40 hours a week a minimum wage worker would take home about \$2,400 a month. The average one-bedroom in the city of Calgary – that's where I live; those are the people that I represent – is between \$1,600 and \$1,800 a month. That eats up three-quarters of before-tax income for these workers, Mr. Speaker. That means that they have \$600 to cover taxes, food, gas, clothing, diapers, anything. That's a real problem. Like, if I were to call this a crisis or an emergency, I don't think it would be overstating the case. This low-level stress, especially for younger families, is persistent. It sticks with them in every moment.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, I don't know how many members in this House have lived paycheque to paycheque. I remember once having a debate with someone I was in law school with who said: I deserve to earn more than everyone else because I had to work hard to get here. I will say for the record that as someone who has both lived paycheque to paycheque and gone to law school, living paycheque to paycheque is harder. There is absolutely no question in my mind. The constant stress that if your car breaks down, you can't eat; the constant fear that if one little thing goes wrong, you won't make your rent: it's constant, and we should be doing something about it.

The proposal in this bill is that the minimum wage would go to \$16 immediately, \$17 in October of 2026, and \$18 in October of 2027, and index to inflation thereafter. The phase-in is to recognize that even though the situation is incredibly urgent, we're trying to balance the ability for businesses to adapt. We would also, Mr.

Speaker, with this bill go out and consult with small businesses on what supports might best help them. We do recognize that there are impacts on small businesses, but it's worth noting that the majority of minimum wage earners are not working for small businesses. The majority of minimum wage earners are working for much larger corporations. In fact, many of the small businesses I have spoken to in Calgary don't pay minimum wage because they can't attract workers for that rate. That's why they don't pay it. So for those businesses that are already paying a decent rate to make sure that they can retain their employees, this levels the playing field. It gets the bad actors out. Actually, it evens things up in a lot of ways.

Had the minimum wage been indexed from 2019, it would be at roughly \$18.45 to \$18.50 right now, so aiming at \$18 isn't absurd, especially not, Mr. Speaker, when you look around at other jurisdictions. That's even assuming that they're not indexed, which most of them are. This would put us nearer to the top but still within the range of what other jurisdictions are doing, so it's definitely not ridiculous. This will bring us much closer to comparator large provinces, someplace like B.C.

The other thing that this bill does, Mr. Speaker, is that it gets rid of the youth differential. I think that this is incredibly important just from a human rights perspective, right? Once upon a time we said this about women, too. Once upon a time we said this about persons of colour, too, that their labour wasn't worth the same. Today we have eliminated those things, but we still say it about young people, that their labour isn't worth the same. It's discrimination, in my view, and we shouldn't stand for it. Many of these young people are working to support and to pay their way through postsecondary so that they can better their circumstances.

You know, the government loves to stand up and say: this is just kids, and it's just pocket money. People come from different circumstances. I would urge the members of the government to go out and talk to people from all different walks of life. Not everyone's parents pay for their university. That's a real thing. If we are saying that people – and bootstraps is a famous thing of the conservatives – should pull themselves up, then perhaps we should give them the opportunity to do that. Perhaps we should give these young workers the opportunity to save for university and to better themselves, to move on, to get a better job, to do all the things that the members over there say that they should do if they don't want to earn the minimum wage anymore.

It's worth saying, you know, that the government loves to go on about how this would increase youth unemployment. Mr. Speaker, it is really worth pointing out that we have the lowest minimum wage in the country and even lower youth minimum wage, yet we have the highest youth unemployment in the country. So those things do not seem to be correlated in the way that the government members would like to suggest.

It also does tipping protection. We have consulted extensively on this; it is incredibly important, and, Mr. Speaker, I urge all members to vote in favour.

The Acting Speaker: I will call on the Member for Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I won't take long, but I do want to speak to this issue. I find it interesting that the member's bill is protecting workers' pay employment standards. Now, she used the term "affordability" in that same speech. I find it rich that the members opposite, knowing full well that they raised minimum wage by almost 50 per cent when they got in and, in fact... [interjections] For those who are watching: big clap on the other side. And let's finish the sentence: drove out 24,000 jobs of young people. Are they still? I didn't hear them clapping.

Why is it that they're not clapping? The members know full well – in fact, I will actually go back in history and talk about this. The member in the opposition, the Opposition House Leader, was the labour minister at the time. I was the labour critic at the time, and I went to her with all of the empirical data that showed that when you have that kind of price shock, when you raise that minimum wage at that rate – there was a plethora of information out there that showed what the outcome would be, which is that that would actually cause high unemployment amongst young people. Her response, Mr. Speaker, was that this was not going to happen, that there was no evidence of it. Even though I provided that evidence to her, she said that she didn't believe that that was going to happen. Then the final response from her was that we will assess as we go.

Hindsight is 20/20 vision. The reality is that because of that price shock, because of what they did, they passed that price on. All businesses can't do it for free, Mr. Speaker, so what happens is that when you provide that kind of direction, like the NDP government did, then businesses have to respond. The response that they did was to pass that price on to the consumer, which drives up price, which is an affordability issue. So when the members talk about this as an affordability measure and to fix affordability using this, I have no idea how they can square that. The reality is that when they do increase those prices, businesses will pass that price on to the consumer, and this is what's been going on because of the left's belief in this fairy-tale economics.

The reality is, Mr. Speaker – I had an interesting conversation with another member that's no longer in this Chamber, didn't win, Graham Sucha. A nice enough guy. I remember going into an elevator with him and saying: "You know, Graham, where have your socialist strategies ever worked? Economically, where have they ever worked?" His response, no word of a lie: "*Star Trek*." And I said to him: "You do know that that's science fiction, right? You do know that that's not real?" He said, "Well, it could be." And I said: "Well, we don't live in that kind of world, Graham. We live in the real world, so you have to take that into consideration." Anyways, I honestly believe that most of the stuff that we have coming from the left, which is one of the reasons why they have only won one term, is because Albertans recognize that what they're usually proposing is like a *Star Trek* science fiction that really doesn't make sense and that Albertans don't buy.

What we have to do in this province is make sure that we continue on with the Alberta advantage. When people come here – and they come in droves; 600,000 people over the last seven years – the reality is that they come here because there are jobs. There are opportunities here. They want to be able to make a living for their family. The United Conservative government does that very, very well. We make sure that they have the opportunities to be able to not just survive here but thrive here.

3:30

The last thing I'll say on this issue of minimum wage is that for the vast majority of the people that I talk to – and I was there at one point; we were all there at one point – as you get more education, you're able to move up in getting higher, better paying jobs. When you're starting out in a minimum wage job, you're doing it because you're trying to get those skills and that understanding about what it is to work. So that isn't a living wage. You don't want to have people stuck there; nobody wants to be stuck there. So, Mr. Speaker, this idea that we have to continue to raise this – really, in reality, let the market decide these things. The market in Alberta really already has decided. We often pay far more than what minimum wage is because that's what the market dictates.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Klein.

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Wow. That's a lot to follow behind. I rise to speak in support of this bill. I think it's incredibly important and also is in touch with the realities of Albertans.

To think a little bit on the remarks from the last member about what real life is, I am amazed time and time again just how out of touch this government is with the realities of working Albertans. We have the lowest minimum wage in the country. We have some of the highest costs of living, which this government has allowed to balloon. That includes insurance rates going up by up to 15 per cent over the next two years. They have failed to take any action on real affordability for Albertans. I'll just point to simple things like a cap on increases for rents.

You know, I hear time and time again members from the other side talking in very boastful terms about how we have the most homes ever and that rents are going down, and they fail to mention that that is after having the highest increases. I remember a time in 2024, not long ago, when we actually had in Calgary the highest rents across the country. So when we're talking about the realities of lived Albertans, I'm always awestruck by the ability of members from the other side to actively ignore the voices of their constituents. I'm sure you have many constituents who are making a \$15 minimum wage.

I just want to point out what that looks like as an annual salary. As an annual salary minimum wage works out to about \$31,500 a year. That works out to I think around \$2,600 monthly. If we look at the formula for affordable housing – I used to be the treasurer of a housing co-op and worked a lot with folks who had to receive subsidies because they were earning such low wages – the formula is generally accepted to be at around 30 per cent of your take-home pay being that affordable rent. In order to have an affordable rent at minimum wage, a person would have to be paying about \$787 a month.

I want just to do a little bit of a temperature check here, Mr. Speaker. I don't know of any places – I see a lot of members on the other side who are in Calgary, who are in Edmonton, even Red Deer, some of the folks here on our side of the aisle. When was the last time rent was \$787 a month for anyone?

I hear them talking a lot about youth as well, so I'll just touch on that with a little bit of a story. Picture this. You have a single mother working for minimum wage with two kids, one teenager 16 years old and the other one in elementary school or middle school. That 16-year-old is asked by her mother to take on work because they can't afford to pay the bills. Obviously, with the rents that we're seeing here, we know that is a definite possibility. So now we have two people working minimum wage jobs. I can see that there was a minimum wage profile done. We're talking about maybe 5 per cent of the population that's earning minimum wage, but about 59 per cent of that population is women.

The daughter is working for two years – two years – in food service at the tiered minimum wage. Working for two years at the tiered minimum wage, doing an excellent job, getting excellent reviews, and when she turns 18 and informs her employers, she gets let go as someone who is able to earn the tiered minimum wage. At that time there was no STEP program, as there isn't now, so no avenue for this young person to make a wage and to make their way into better circumstances, as the member opposite was talking about, how education is the magic pill for earning a better wage.

Well, I can tell you that that same single mother – we're talking from 1991 until 2008 – continues to make just over minimum wage decades later. And her daughter is barely making over that amount herself with education, having to save to supplement, having to

work that minimum wage job to supplement an income even with student loans to be able to get through university. Unfortunately, we find ourselves in very similar circumstances now. I see stories like this come through my office every day. That particular story was my story. That was my story.

Further to that – we're talking about 2016 now, when the first increase in minimum wage was enacted. By this time I have two kids, I have an education, I have a career behind me, and there's no work in Alberta. My husband had to work in B.C., and we accepted our lot. I worked part-time again in the service industry. At that time, with an education, with kids in tow and trying to pay our mortgage, I was making \$12.20 an hour. So when we talk about being out of touch with reality, that's one story, my story. I'm very lucky to be where I am now.

Sadly, this is the story that I hear from Albertans every day, people working in the service industry. I've heard members across the aisle talk about who deserves to make a minimum wage: if you just get an education, if you just work harder, you'll get there. Well, guess what? That's not happening here. We have youth who are making a tiered minimum wage, and this government is telling us that they do not deserve the same wage as their peers doing the same work. It is discrimination, and I think we're past that now in this province. We should be. I mean, given the actions of this government maybe not. But I know that on the horizon there is better, and that's what Albertans deserve.

Our inflation since 2018 has gone up by 20 per cent, and minimum wage has not budged. No amount of hard work by these folks that I talk to every day, that perhaps any of these members could sit down and have a conversation with, their constituents making minimum wage, is making life more affordable for them. In fact, this government, in another let them eat cake moment, is saying: increases for me but not for thee. They increased their living allowance by 14 per cent because rents were going up. It is shameful to look at Albertans and to say that they do not deserve that relief on their wages.

3:40

We talk a lot about the Alberta advantage, and I would implore the members opposite to think about who we serve. I've said this before. We're talking about people in minimum wage jobs. The people who serve are the people that we serve, and they would be better served by this government considering increasing the minimum wage and passing this bill.

The Acting Speaker: I'll call on the minister of housing.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to rise on this legislation. You know, I was listening to the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein's comments with interest as she was debating this legislation before the Chamber, and I was struck by a couple of things that I think are worth having a conversation about in the Chamber as we consider this piece of legislation or whether or not you want to support this private member's bill.

One of the challenges that you often see from the Official Opposition is a tendency to play fast and loose with the facts, and you saw that in this presentation from the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein in quite glaring ways and a couple of ways I would like to correct the record on with the few moments that I have to speak on this legislation. That said, her personal story that she shared before the Chamber was very sad, and I appreciate, Mr. Speaker, her sharing that story. Through you to her: thank you for that.

I will point out, though, to start off my remarks today, that the hon. member was referring to a period of time in 2016. Now, in

2016 I was sitting a little bit over, two seats in front of that member and over a little bit towards the leader's chair, and you know who was sitting on this side of the Legislature? That's right. I know you know. The NDP were in charge during that period of time, showing – I actually think she's correct – some of the great challenges that we saw on affordability when the Official Opposition got control of the government.

At that time, Mr. Speaker, as you know, their approach to these challenging issues was to tell people that didn't have a job to go and move to B.C. That was going to be what their approach to the situation was. They didn't invest in things like affordable housing. In fact, affordable housing wait-lists went up by 75 per cent during the period of time that the NDP were in government.

Now, Mr. Speaker, another interesting thing – again, this is important because it shows that the NDP actually don't have a clue what is going on with affordable housing policy. The hon. member said that because rent would go up to a certain price – I think she said \$750 in her comments – that would mean that somebody who was on Alberta affordable housing programs would have to pay \$750. Now, she says that she was part of affordable housing boards in the past. She may not have paid attention at that time, but in Alberta, just like every other province, when it comes to affordable housing programs, you pay 30 per cent of what you make, not what rent is.

That is the point of the rent subsidy program that we have inside this province, where currently my department invests in 82,000 households, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that they can keep their rent at 30 per cent of what they make. So there would be no consideration at any time in any rental program that is receiving affordable housing support that that could take place. It's just factually incorrect, not even close to anywhere near the truth, about how affordable housing rates work. That's very important that we would note that, so to be clear, I think that needs to be corrected.

The other thing that the hon. member referred to was, I mean, almost comically, Mr. Speaker, saying that at some point in time Alberta had the highest rents in the country. There was no point ever – period; full stop – where that ever has taken place, where Alberta had the highest rents in the entire country. I would refer the hon. member to Vancouver, where people are commuting by airplane from Calgary, flying to Vancouver every day for work and flying back home to get rent. If the hon. member wants to say in this Chamber with a straight face that somehow Calgary's and Edmonton's rents have been more than Vancouver's, she is just factually wrong, and she should take some time to research that.

Toronto: I mean, wow. What a mess in Toronto, nowhere close to the situation that we see taking place in Calgary. Now, it would have been if we had left the situation underneath the NDP's rule. We may have ended up in those circumstances because they would have wanted to pursue some of the same policies that we saw in places like Vancouver and Toronto, things like rent control. Those are the only jurisdictions who have played with it, and they have the highest rent and, by the way, the lowest builds anywhere inside the country, the lowest purpose-built rentals anywhere inside the country because of their playing with rent control.

That is a fact. It's something that, if the NDP want credibility when they're asking for members of this Chamber to support private members' legislation, they should probably get correct before they stand up in this Chamber and essentially get something that is so verifiably wrong like standing up and saying to you, Mr. Speaker, that Calgary's rent is more than Vancouver or Toronto. It's quite shocking.

Now, I am also happy to report, Mr. Speaker, in this term of the Legislature underneath the leadership of the United Conservative Party rent has consistently went down for the entire term over the

period of time. [interjections] The hon. members are laughing because it really upsets them, the fact that rent in Alberta is down 7 per cent – 7 per cent – the most anywhere inside the country. I don't know why that's funny – I think it's great news and we should celebrate it – other than that the NDP are disappointed that they continue to lose their fake talking point as they get up inside the Chamber.

Now, the other thing the member referred to was the fact that no affordable housing units were being built. Since 2019, not 2016 when the NDP were in power and the hon. member was having her tough circumstances take place, more than 8,300 new affordable housing units have been built, approximately 800 new shelter spaces have been built, nearly 2,000 new units specifically for seniors have been built, more than 3,000 new continuing care spaces have been built, Mr. Speaker, with an investment of \$2 billion, all part of a \$9 billion investment between us and our partners, including the federal government, to make 82,000 more affordable households inside the province of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, if we had listened – I think this is important for members who may be considering this private member's legislation. The arguments that were just presented were to support it based on the housing numbers that were presented by the MLA for Calgary-Klein, but they're so far out of reach that I think it would probably make you want to question whether you want to support this legislation if that's the reason that you would bring it forward.

If we had listened to the NDP two years ago, when the housing crisis started to become pretty significant across the country, when we went from being short 22,000 houses in Alberta to being short almost 100,000 houses in a period of under a year, those are the circumstances that we would be in right now. We would have brought in rent control. We would have stifled our industry. We would have stopped the construction industry from being able to do its job, Mr. Speaker, and we would have been Toronto or Vancouver, sadly. But this side of the House did not listen to the NDP. You know, I would say that that is actually probably a good philosophy to generally have, not listen to the NDP because they're so far out of reach when it comes to things like this issue.

We didn't listen to them, so you know what we ended up having? We have had two consecutive years of record-breaking years, every quarter more houses built than anywhere in the country. We have under 15 per cent of the entire population of Canada, and we're responsible for 25 per cent of all new housing builds. One-third of all our builds are purpose-built rentals, which is absolutely critical for restoring stability to the province.

While the rest of the country sees housing starts going down in double digits, we continue to see it go up in double digits. Mr. Speaker, we're the only place, only large jurisdiction as far as cities, where rent is going down anywhere in the country of Canada. That's because we didn't listen to the NDP. I would submit to you that when you look at this private member's bill, you should not listen to them so we can continue to see success. The NDP's record on this issue, on affordability, is dismal.

When they had their moment in the sun, Mr. Speaker, the only one-term government in the history of the province, they saw the most investment ever flee Alberta underneath their leadership. They saw the highest unemployment underneath their leadership outside of the COVID context. They told people who did not have jobs just to leave Alberta, pack up and move out of Alberta. They tried to shut the family farm during their period of time, directly attacking agriculture, and stood on the steps, the very steps of this beautiful building, the seat of our democracy here in Alberta, and protested against pipelines and the oil and gas industry, standing up against

the men and women who make up the largest industry in this province and in this country. That's what the NDP does.

3:50

If they want to come up and gain support for their legislation, humbly, I would suggest to them: get your facts straight. Standing up and making up numbers that are so factually easy to prove are not true is not how you get support for your legislation. It's how you get support not to vote for your legislation. I've passed lots of bills in this Legislature. Why? Because when I get up and I talk to my colleagues, I don't make things up. So I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker . . . [interjections] They're laughing because they got it wrong again, and I suspect they're not going to get the votes they need. I highly encourage my members and my friends inside this Legislature to vote against this ridiculous piece of legislation.

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

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, that was a very passionate display from the member opposite, but if they don't want to listen to the NDP, then at least listen to Albertans. We are hearing from Albertans time and time again. They are asking for relief from this government, and they are not providing it. Affordability is at an all-time crisis, and instead we are focusing on going after who? Albertans? Teachers? I don't know. To me that seems like a government that doesn't have the best interests of Albertans, but – listen to me – I'm just someone who represents a few thousand Albertans that also want a voice in this House.

Let's talk about what we can do to provide real relief to Albertans. I really believe Bill 201 is one way that we can support them. I thank my wonderful colleagues from Calgary-Klein and Calgary-Mountain View for the wonderful submissions that they've made today to this bill about why we need to bring relief to Albertans, specifically workers in this province. I know the other side doesn't want to listen to workers – they just forced them back to work in one sector – let alone let's talk about giving them better pay in this sector, precarious work.

Let's look at what this legislation will do. Albertans per year for the next three years: you can see an increase to your minimum wage up to \$18 in 2027. Then from there we're going to have a continuous index of Alberta CPI for inflation to keep your wage up to date because we know that with minimum wage workers there's no assurance that your employer will be giving you those required raises.

On this elimination of wage differentiation on the basis of age I want to give a little bit of a story like my wonderful colleague from Calgary-Klein provided. Back when I started in the workforce as a young worker, I was making \$7 an hour. At that time I was living at home and I was able to make ends meet. I was able to pay for my insurance. I was able to pay for the gasoline that goes into my very reliable but very not the best vehicle in the world. I called it Boomer. It was wonderful. It got me from A to B. It got me to work, where I worked at a grocery store in Morinville. What that provided me was the ability to continue working, but that was it. I was not able to go on lavish trips. I was not able to buy a lavish vehicle. I was able to get from point A to B.

Right now we are facing an affordability crisis. Back then that was about average for living wage. What we're dealing with now in Alberta is a crisis of people not being able to afford their means of living. We look at where the market is – and my wonderful friend from Calgary-Klein talked about living off about \$2,600 monthly. We look at rent in places like Edmonton and Calgary, where we're seeing an average rent of about \$1,300 a month. When we do budgeting on our personal level as well as for folks living on paycheque to paycheque, we have to consider this. Fifty per cent of

their wage is going to their living expenses. That's just rent. That doesn't include the insurance that you have to have as a renter, that doesn't include the food that you have to buy so you can exist in this world, and it doesn't include all of the other things that add up, especially for single parents, especially for folks that need to pay for child care or for their children to be in school.

So what are we looking at here with this Bill 201? Well, it's to provide that necessary increase that should have come from this government year after year after year. It does bring it up to a level where across the province we can live on something that isn't these poverty wages. We need to understand that there is such uncertainty in the industries that these folks live in.

Let's look at, you know, this other plan to look at tipping, to make actual changes, actual legislation to deal with tipping. We hear from Albertans from across spectrums, from across the political spectrums who are unsure about where that money that they're giving for tipping is going. Let's give them that certainty in Bill 201. We can give them that assurance that those dollars are going to the workers, to the people that serve them or to the collective that agrees to absorb that. This gives Albertans that certainty. People are asking for it. You can see on these forums online folks talking about tipping culture in Canada and in Alberta specifically. They are unsure of where, on that screen where you put the 20 per cent tip, that goes. They want certainty, and this provides them certainty.

In a province like Alberta, where we have a conversation about ensuring that workers are treated fairly, we have to look beyond certain industries. We have to look at every single industry to provide them with the ability to live off the money that they make in their really wonderful jobs like the service industry. Right now we don't have that assurance, and my friend is providing that assurance in Bill 201. I want to support this because I really do value and believe in these facts and figures that the member opposite just mentioned.

Let's bring it back to some stats, how about. Let's look at, you know, the Hospitality Workers Training Centre Beyond the Tip Screen: [Refining] Canada's Tipping Culture. In a 2023 Restaurants Canada survey servers can earn 70 to 75 per cent of their total compensation in tips alone. "Tips are not extra money; tips are essential." That's a quote from one of the articles that they posted online. Bill 201 brings that certainty to Albertans about where their tips are going. Right now we are in a situation where people deserve to keep the dollars in their pocket, and they deserve to live with a good-quality job that they can make ends meet, not this half of their paycheque is going to rent. When we're doing that budgeting, we have to remember that housing should only be an accounting of 30 per cent of your wages. Right now we're paying well over 50 per cent if you're working in those service industry jobs with the minimum wage as it presently sits.

Let's have a conversation about where we're – we need to look at why this is. Why is this? Let's look at the RBC report of October 22, 2025, which talks about Alberta's population growth and Alberta's economy, which challenges young job seekers. To the member opposite: we have some facts. We see that. We see that the Alberta labour force growth continues to outpace job creation for young people in Alberta. We have a youth unemployment rate of 14.7 per cent according to this report, and in Edmonton and Calgary that's over 18 per cent as well. I talk to my constituents. I talk to the young people that live in Edmonton-West Henday and across the city. They're struggling. They're struggling to find good jobs. They're struggling to keep those good jobs because they cannot make their ends meet.

I only think of Larry, who came to one of our town halls this summer for our Better Together summer, where we had a conversation about budgeting, about making sure that they could make

those ends meet. Larry has to live at home because he is unable to make those ends meet under this current regime. We need to provide better for Albertans. That is our job in this institution, in this Chamber. We should be providing a better life than we got to have. We need to be providing a better future for the next generation. When we have a youth unemployment rate of almost 20 per cent, we have to ask ourselves: what are we doing? Why are we not doing better? Why are we focusing on the wrong priorities?

When I heard the throne speech – and we talk about what their supreme leader in Ottawa, Pierre Poilievre, is saying on talking about the temporary foreign worker program. Quote: instead of focusing on economic immigration, the federal government opened the floodgates for nonpermanent residents to unsustainable levels. End quote.

4:00

What are we saying here to those newcomers that came to this province on the promise and the assurance that they could build a better life for their families and for themselves? We need to talk about this youth unemployment, of it being led by newcomers both interprovincially but also internationally. They deserve to be heard as well. These folks deserve a government that works for them, not against them, and this needs to be indicated for sure. Young people are feeling betrayed by this government, from schools to the workplace. Let's give them some hope, and let's pass Bill 201 to give them that assurance.

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

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How many minutes do I have?

The Acting Speaker: Ten.

Mr. Cyr: Ten minutes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-Mountain View for putting forward a bill. Now, one of the things that many in this Chamber may not remember is that I, too, have put a bill through in my own time, in my first sitting as an opposition member back in 2015-19, Bill 202, Protecting Victims of Non-consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act. Now, at that time this would be the former justice minister, and we also had the former education minister. I had worked very closely with both of those ministers, and I will say that I'm very thankful for the input and how we were able to guide that bill into the law it's become today. When you work closely with government and you're trying to put forward legislation that is an actual benefit to the people of Alberta, you'll find that there's really a lot of momentum that comes from that.

Getting into this, I've got to say that after hearing my colleague the minister of assisted living and social housing, and our chief whip: they're bringing up some important points that the opposition continues to miss. Unfortunately, they keep continuing on down this road of trying to create a living wage out of a minimum wage, and those are two very different concepts, but they're important. It's important to understand that they are not the same.

Now, today I will be speaking in opposition to this Bill 201, and it grieves me because I see how hard this member has worked at moving this bill forward, and she's clearly put some thought into it, but she hasn't actually done the consultation that she needs. We're hearing that from my colleagues, and we're hearing that with the business community, and we're likely going to be hearing that from Albertans if it was to move forward. If this is passed this bill will mandate the annual increase of the minimum wage in Alberta, index future increases to inflation, eliminate the student minimum wage,

and introduce a new tip pooling regulation that adds unnecessary red tape to our business community.

Mr. Speaker, while this bill suggests that it is protecting workers' pay, the reality is that it does quite the opposite. It threatens the very jobs of young Albertans relying on entering the workforce and, if legislated, will put a real burden on small businesses with costs and regulations that will risk their ability to stay open and employ Albertans.

Now, this is at a time, Mr. Speaker, that a lot of these small businesses are struggling to get past a lot of the debt that they accumulated from the COVID-19 pandemic. The CEBA loans, the lines of credit, the debt consolidations: all of these things are realities that our small businesses are trying to move past. Clearly, the opposition in this is deaf to their pleas, saying, "Hey, just give us a little bit of time to breathe because right now we're hurting, and we're hurting very badly. We need to dig ourselves out of this hole that we had gotten into." It's clear that putting more burdens on them is going to be a hardship in Canada. We've built our reputation in Alberta by focusing on cutting red tape, lowering taxes, creating a business-friendly environment that attracts investment and creates jobs. Our government has worked tirelessly to ensure that Alberta remains competitive, and we have seen the results. More businesses are choosing Alberta, which means more jobs and opportunities for all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP's proposal of Bill 201 is concerning, though not surprising. It reflects the same approach they took while in government, the approach that ignored the realities faced by employers by failing to consult with the very people who drive our economy and employ Albertans.

Now, one of the important points that's brought up is that youth unemployment is rather high, and that is disheartening for myself and the youth, I'm sure, but it is important to recognize that during our time we have mass immigration and migration into Alberta. That's an important fact when we're talking about this, whereas the NDP during their time had out-migration happening, yet they still had high young unemployment rates. Our goal in all of this is to make sure that we reduce the youth unemployment rate, yet the NDP admitted as recently as September that they have done zero consultation with our business community on minimum wage. Mr. Speaker, that shows the NDP has not done their due diligence to build responsible policies that work for both the employers and the employees.

Raising a minimum wage may sound like a simple solution to the national affordability crisis. Unfortunately, increasing the minimum wage without proper consultation leads to consequences for all Albertans: higher cost of goods and services, reduced hours for employees, and in many cases job losses. Alberta's youth are already facing a national unemployment crisis, yet Bill 201 proposes to eliminate the student minimum wage, a policy that is specifically designed to help young people get their foot underneath them. Entry-level jobs are critical for youth. They provide real-world experience, build employable skills, and serve as the stepping stones for long-term careers. By eliminating the student wage and increasing costs for employers, Bill 201 puts these opportunities at risk for youth.

Our government does not believe in Band-Aid solutions that hurt our youth and our labour market. We believe in real, concrete, targeted solutions that address the root cause of youth unemployment. That's why we introduced the Alberta youth employment incentive, a program that provides \$8 million in grants to employers to offset the costs of hiring, training, and employing youth aged 15 to 24. This initiative is expected to support 2,500 Albertan youths to find meaningful employment. Mr. Speaker, we are balancing the needs of Alberta's workforce while ensuring that

businesses are not burdened with higher costs that will lead to layoffs and closures.

With the federal Liberal-NDP coalition's economic mismanagement and Alberta experiencing record-breaking population growth, now is not the time to impose harmful regulations that could inhibit our Alberta businesses to thrive. This is the time to ensure Albertans can continue to find work and build a future. The NDP's proposal to index minimum wage to inflation may sound virtuous on the surface, but it removes flexibility from future governments to respond to changing economic conditions. A one-size-fits-all approach is simply not the answer.

Additionally, the tip protection provisions in Bill 201 raise unanswered questions. The bill fails to explain how the bill's pooling agreement would be enforced and regulated. This is an important point to be made because we are going down a different path from the federal government. That means employers now will have to calculate this on a provincial and a federal level. Think of the money this is going to cost our small businesses as they go through – and you know what? It's not surprising that they would have missed this important thought when they had put this forward.

4:10

If the NDP is serious about protecting workers they should start talking to the business owners who are impacted the most. They have engaged a meaningful consultation and work collaboratively to find solutions to work for all Albertans. It is important to recognize that a small percentage of Albertans earn minimum wage, many of which are employed in sectors that allow minimum wages to be determined by market forces and skill level. Using minimum wage policy as a tool to address affordability is highly ineffective and does more harm than good.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any others wishing to speak? The Member for Calgary-Edgemont.

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak in favour of Bill 201, the fairness for workers act. I really appreciate the Member for Calgary-Mountain View putting forward this very important legislation. When I think about my residents of Calgary-Edgemont, this is something that they need. This is something that would benefit them, and it should be a priority for all of us to be looking at raising wages, and looking at protecting tips, and stopping the nonsense of a two-level minimum wage.

I had the privilege, just before Saskatchewan raised their minimum wage to make us here in Alberta the lowest minimum wage in all of Canada, to listen to Janine Rogan, a CPA from the Wealth Building Academy, at a press conference where she painted a picture – and it kind of really put things into perspective for me – of a two-bedroom apartment in Calgary. We've heard it today: \$1,900 a month; in Edmonton, \$1,700.

At our current minimum wage, the lowest in Canada, a full-time worker earns \$2,600 before taxes. But then after we pay the rent, there's barely enough left for our groceries, our gas, and, for some people, child care. Experts – Janine Rogan – said: no household should pay more than 30 per cent of its income on housing. At today's rent, a family would need nearly \$76,000 after tax. That's equivalent, and I want to put that into perspective, of three adults. Three adults need to be working in that home for more than 50 hours per week at minimum wage just to get by.

For years we've heard about the so-called Alberta advantage, that here you can work hard, you can earn a fair wage, and build a life, but more and more that advantage only exists in speeches and it's

not in real life, and I don't always see it anymore. I hear so much about affordability and how wages are not matching their bills.

I can't be here today without talking about minimum wage or the tip-out program and who those workers are that we're usually talking about, because 60 per cent of those minimum wage earners in Alberta are women. Across Alberta women make up nearly two-thirds of all minimum wage earners. They are the servers, the cashiers, the early childhood educators, the cleaners, the health care aides who hold this province together. They are the same people who were called essential just a few years ago, and yet they're still being paid wages that don't cover their cost of living.

Alberta hasn't raised its minimum wage since 2018 under the NDP, while every other province has moved ahead of us. We now have the lowest minimum wage in Canada and among the highest costs of living. So when this government talks about the Alberta advantage I have to ask: who is this advantage for? Right now it's not for the single mom serving the tables or the nursing aide pulling a double shift or the cashier holding down three jobs just to pay for her rent. It's not an advantage when women are working full time and still living in poverty. It's not an advantage when people provide care in our communities and can't afford to take care of their own kids.

Raising the minimum wage and protecting tips are an equality issue, not just a labour issue. The gender pay gap in Alberta remains one of the widest in the country. On average women earn about 17 per cent less than men, and that gap, Mr. Speaker, is even greater for Indigenous women, racialized women, and newcomers. One of the biggest reasons is that women are concentrated in the lowest paid sectors: hospitality, retail, care work, and food services, the very sectors that are relying on minimum wage. These are not easy jobs. They're emotionally demanding. They're physically exhausting and absolutely essential to our communities. But because they've historically been seen as women's work, they've been undervalued and underpaid for generations. Many women take these jobs because of the flexibility that they're needing with those hours. It's necessary. They're balancing paid work with unpaid caregiving for children as well as caring for parents and other family members.

Alberta has one of the highest rates of part-time work among women in Canada, and most of it isn't by choice. It's because affordable child care and stable full-time opportunities are out of reach. Add to that the barriers of higher paying fields, discrimination, limited mentorship, and lack of family-friendly policies, and you see why women are still concentrated in the lowest paid sectors. When we talk about the gender pay gap, we're not talking about individual choices; we're talking about systems that undervalue our care work. We expect women to always fill the gaps and then pay them less for doing it.

Raising the minimum wage is one concrete way that we can start narrowing the gap today. When we lift wages at the bottom, studies across Canada have shown the gender pay gap narrows, families gain stability, food bank use declines, communities grow stronger. Alberta's women are working harder than ever, and it's time their work was valued accordingly.

Families are paying among the highest electricity in the country. Per-student education funding is the lowest in Canada. Insurance rates are the third highest in Canada. For working Albertans wages simply haven't kept up to the cost of living. We cannot call it an advantage when people are working full-time, working multiple jobs and still can't make ends meet.

I truly appreciate the Member for Calgary-Klein standing so bravely in this House today, sharing her story, sharing the story of her with her mother, her with her daughters, and I am so proud to stand here every day with her in this House and all of the other

moms and all of the other workers that have also worked minimum wage just to be able to make ends meet.

Bill 201 will restore some of these balances. It will raise the minimum wage. It will protect workers' tips and give every Albertan a chance for stability.

I want to read a quote from a book, Mr. Speaker, that I am currently reading called *The Pink Tax*, and I think it kind of summarizes the portion where I want to talk about women in the economy and raising the minimum wage: if we continue on without seriously addressing the financial discrimination against women, a 2020 World Economic Forum report suggests that we will not have equal economic participation until the year 2277. That's more than 250 years. I don't know about you, but that fact that my grandchildren are unlikely to experience economic gender parity is extremely troublesome.

Bill 201 calls as well for the end of the youth wage, a policy that should never have existed in the first place. When the government cut the minimum wage for students under 18, it sent a clear message that your age determines your worth, but the cost of living doesn't change depending on your age and neither should your paycheck. Youth don't have lower insurance bills. If anything, they pay more. There's no youth rate for gas or groceries.

I think of my own 17-year-old son. He wants to work, but first of all to get to work, it's going to cost him some money. He's going to need either gas money, he's going to need insurance on that vehicle, or he's going to have to take transit, but everything has gone up. Even if he could find a job, the youth wage wouldn't come close to covering those costs. Many teens, like my own child, you know, are wanting to save for postsecondary, which under this government is becoming even more expensive.

4:20

Bill 201 is a step in the right direction. It won't fix everything that Albertans are facing right now, but it's going to make a real difference for people who are struggling the most: the servers, the students, the single parents, the women, and the young people just starting out. Raising the minimum wage and protecting tips won't make anyone rich, but it will give people more breathing room and fewer impossible choices between rent, food, and utility bills. This bill gives us the chance to show that we value people's time, their labour, and their contributions to this province. I will stand up proudly to support Bill 201.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to stand and speak in favour of Bill 201. We've heard some arguments from the government members. One of the government members argued that their government prefers to support the free market, to let the free market make decisions.

Mr. Dreeshen: Hear, hear.

Mr. Shepherd: "Hear, hear," says the minister of transportation.

However, the minister of transportation was happy to support his government when they interfered in the free market when it comes to the renewable sector. If this is a government that supports a free market, Mr. Speaker, why did they go out of their way to put pressure on independent bodies in this province to support their policy to put a ban on the renewable industry in this province for multiple months, creating incredible uncertainty, and then implement lopsided regulation, that does not apply to any other type of energy production in the province of Alberta, on just that particular industry, cratering investment and driving out thousands

of jobs? Those are not the actions of a government that supports the free market.

The Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul had quite a bit to say about unnecessary red tape, harmful regulations that hurt businesses, lack of consultation. All of those apply there as well, Mr. Speaker. I have not heard that member condemn the red tape that they imposed on the renewable industry. I have not heard him speak out against the harmful regulations that have absolutely hurt business and driven jobs and investment out of the province. It appears these members have very selective opinions on who deserves freedom in this province. They are more than happy to put their thumb on the scale and to pick and choose which individuals and which industries they're going to support.

Now, the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul also spoke about, you know, harm to businesses that makes it difficult for them to be able to afford to practise the cost that would be imposed by raising the minimum wage. You know what, Mr. Speaker? If he's concerned about costs, maybe he should look at the effect of the extra tax that every business in this province is paying because of his government's record of failure on public safety.

We do consult, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I met with the . . .

The name escapes me.

An Hon. Member: Business Council of Alberta.

Mr. Shepherd: . . . Business Council of Alberta just the other week. Thank you to my colleague.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

That was the top issue for their members; 94 per cent of their members said that community safety and vibrancy was the top issue for them. I talk to businesses every day, Madam Speaker, not to mention residents in my constituency, who are seeing thousands of dollars in extra costs because this government refuses to step up in terms of its responsibilities on things like mental health, substance use and addictions, addressing the issue of homelessness and the cost of social disorder. That, I would say, is impacting businesses across this province, but this government does nothing.

Now, the minister of transportation was talking about the carbon tax. I will note the carbon tax has been removed. We have not seen the price of groceries come down though these individuals claim that was the sole driver of what was driving grocery prices up. That shows the level of economic literacy of the minister of transportation and his colleagues.

Now, the fact is, Madam Speaker, that we are talking here about the minimum wage. We are talking about Bill 201. What we can say is that what businesses are looking for is certainty. Indeed, when we had a consultation with the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, we talked to them about the minimum wage. I wonder if the government colleagues did when they spoke with them. What the CFIB told us is that – you know what? – they're not opposed to raising the minimum wage. Imagine that, Madam Speaker. Consultation with an organization that represents businesses. They are not opposed to raising the minimum wage. What they asked for was certainty. What they asked for was a clear and reasonable path forward so businesses can understand what's going to happen, and what we do not have under this government on minimum wage and a wide variety of other things is any semblance of certainty. What we have under this government is chaos, and that hurts businesses. Again, remembering that renewable ban and nobody knowing which way this government was going to jump or what they were going to impose and the deep damage it did to that industry.

It is similar, Madam Speaker, when it comes to minimum wage. What we have in almost every other province in Canada is some

sort of legislative index, some means by which businesses and others can predictably understand when there will be an increase in the minimum wage. To be clear, as one of my other colleagues noted, this is the longest period we have gone in the province of Alberta without an increase to the minimum wage during one of the most steep climbs of inflation. This government has not spoken to it. They have done nothing to acknowledge it. They have not provided any communication or shown any intent of moving, and the fact is that what that creates is uncertainty.

What Bill 201 provides is certainty. Again, businesses aren't opposed to minimum wage going up. What they are opposed to certainly are sharp spikes that they can't handle. They are certainly concerned about the speed at which it goes, but what we have here is a proposal for a thoughtful path from \$15 an hour to \$18. Again, there is that opportunity for consultation to shape how that goes, but it provides certainty. The fact is, Madam Speaker, that it is unsustainable to simply sit on our hands after a period of massive inflation and say, "Those who earn the least among us should keep earning exactly that least," but that seems to be the government's position. They have no interest in making any changes whatsoever. Frankly, that is a disservice.

You know, these government members talk about the record of our government. You know what record of our government was, Madam Speaker? We cut child poverty in half. Under this government it has done nothing but rise. [interjection] The member wants to heckle about child poverty. That's the class level of this government.

Again, the record shows we cut child poverty in half, and it has gone up under this government, just as the number of people living without housing has continued to go up under this government. The level of social disorder in our province has continued to go up under this government. This government has nothing to be proud of with this record.

I want to take a moment to speak to one other provision in Bill 201, that being the provision regarding tips. As many members know, Madam Speaker, I spent a chunk of time, probably about a dozen years, working in the music industry. Generally if you're working in music, you're working other jobs. For me that was that I did a lot of restaurant work, did a lot of serving, a lot of waitering. *Edmonton Queen* riverboat, Von's Steak & Fish House, the Century Grill: a tour of a number of different establishments here in Edmonton. And you know what? That is respectable work. It is difficult work. Sometimes we think we face challenges as politicians with the expectations that can be put on us. Let me tell you, what servers go through each and every day, how they get treated – hey, a lot of customers treat you well, but I mean, the worst of it is pretty bad.

But you know what? Servers do it because, hey, yeah, you can make decent money in tips. You're earning minimum wage. I remember back when I was serving, I was earning the minimum wage. I forget exactly what it was, but the tips made it worth while. On a good night I could take home a couple hundred dollars, and that allowed me to be able to continue to pursue music and it brought a flexibility and that with it, but – you know what? – there is a problem when it comes to the tip-out culture. What Bill 201 does is ensure that when we give somebody a tip, they are keeping that tip. That it is not going to subsidize a business because that is not what tips are for. If the costs of the restaurant are going up, then you need to raise prices; you need to look at other things. They should not be taking tips away from the individuals that are working on the front lines to earn them.

4:30

Now, there are smart provisions here to make sure that, you know, we can still have tip outs amongst staff, amongst the front

line. I remember doing that. Hey, the cooks are doing a big job, the bus people to help ensure that I can earn my tips; I'm more than happy to give them part of what I take in. But it should not be going to management and ownership. Bill 201 ensures that does not take place.

That should be a simple thing for this government to support, Madam Speaker. In fact, I'm surprised they haven't taken the opportunity to introduce it themselves. They certainly are fond of pushing through an awful lot of legislation. This would be a very simple piece for them to put through that would actually do something concrete to help Albertans. That would be a refreshing change.

We will see, I guess, where these members fall, but I will be personally voting in support of Bill 201.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on Bill 201? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak about something that touches the lives of thousands across this province. It is the wages, the minimum wage. This is not just a number on a paycheque. It is about the dignity of fathers and mothers. It is about fairness for families. It is about the ability to live with security and hope. Members of the Legislature are all in agreement in terms of the affordability crisis that we are facing. Where we have disagreement is "We're not going to do anything about it" and "We have to do something about this."

We're facing a time when half of Albertans are \$200 away from not being able to pay their bills, from losing their houses. We're seeing an increased number of Albertans turning to the food banks. In fact, our province has recorded the highest number of children who are in food insecurity, who are turning to the schools, and the schools are becoming the only way where they are able to get nutrition.

According to the Calgary Food Bank working a full-time job is not enough to escape from food insecurity – that's a Calgary Food Bank survey – meaning that 37 per cent of those who are turning to food hampers, Madam Speaker, are Albertans who have full-time jobs. You would expect that we should ask ourselves why. The reason is that their earnings are not keeping up with the demand. So it becomes the choice of: should you lose your house or turn to the food bank for food? Albertans are skipping the frequency of food that they will be eating. They are using coupons and other strategies for them when they are shopping for groceries.

These are people who are working. These are not people who are not working. Let's not pretend that the minimum wage is only for young Albertans. No. There are parents who are earning minimum wage who are making \$26,000 to \$28,000 annually. Madam Speaker, the question you will ask: is that to feed their families or to pay their rent? These are the choices that people are facing.

The question I have is that at some point we have to find a way of addressing the problem. If Alberta has the lowest minimum wage, if Albertans are turning to the food bank more than other provinces, if kids who are going to our schools are increasingly seeking nutritious foods from schools, you will expect that this Assembly should come to a situation where we discuss and address the problem.

When the rent hit the members of the government, Madam Speaker, they quickly noticed that and they had done something quickly about it. "We have to increase our allowances." Why? "No, the rent is very high." The Albertans who don't have that ability are the ones who are feeling the pain, and this government is not doing anything about it.

As of October Alberta has the lowest minimum wage in Canada. In fact, you have to think differently and say that the lowest paid

Canadians call Alberta home. If you think about it, the lowest people, workers who are paid the lowest, live in Alberta today. If we had indexed after the last increase, we wouldn't have been facing this problem. It would have been \$18 per hour now. At some point we have to increase.

Well, I've heard from members of the government saying that this is going to hurt the small-business owners. Well, you have to raise at some point. Are you going to raise to a level where it shakes the business community then? If you don't increase it and if you don't have a mechanism to increase it gradually, at some point you have to increase, which will create an instability in the small-business owners. Well, the government will realize that there will be a time that they have to do something about it.

Remember when members from my colleagues tabled the class sizes and class composition private member's bill, which was voted down? But now the government is talking about doing something about class complexity and class sizes. The point is that there will be a time when the government will realize to increase, and then my worry is that it will create instability in the business community and in the economy.

Well, the government continues to defend a lower youth wage, claiming that it helps young people find jobs. I'm wondering what data the government will back this up with. Like, how do you show the evidence that that is the situation? Alberta's youth unemployment rate as of August was 17 per cent. Having the lowest minimum wage didn't help, did it? No. We still have the highest youth unemployment.

Having a lower minimum wage didn't create jobs. It created one thing. Do you know what it is? It created inequity. Many young people work to support their families, Madam Speaker, to pay rent. They deserve fair pay, and that should not be based on their age. That's why Bill 201 revokes the cabinet's authority to create a youth wage differential, and it is a step towards fairness.

A number of my colleagues, Madam Speaker, have talked about the affordability, whether it is on auto insurance, whether it is on utilities, the implications that it is having on people's lives. The minimum wage earners are among the ones that are hit the hardest on that. They face that at the grocery checkout. They face that when it comes to their rent. They face that on their utilities, and they face that on their insurance.

When the government members argue that the minimum wage earners are teenagers, that is not true. According to Alberta's 2024 Minimum Wage Profile only 33 per cent aged between 15 to 19. One of the things that Bill 201 proposes is indexation, and I struggle to understand why, when the government members voted on increasing their rent allowances, they indexed, but at the same time they feel like indexing minimum wage is noneconomical.

4:40

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on Bill 201? The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise today to support Bill 201, the employment standards, and unlike most of my debates here, I'm actually going to rely more on stories than data. I think many of my colleagues have presented some really good data and statistics on how increasing the minimum wage and protecting tips will help Albertans, but I wanted to share a little of my story because I used to work getting paid minimum wage.

I feel like we're almost having a competition on this side of the aisle of who made the least amount of money, but I think it's me. I was making \$5.90 an hour working as a server – too much? – and at that time working as a server was actually part of a minimum wage differential because servers were perceived to not require as

much minimum wage as other workers, which, I can tell you, annoyed the pants off me, Madam Speaker. I relied on my tips to survive during that time, and it was really only when the NDP was in government in 2015 that they got rid of the wage differential for servers. I can tell you that I am sure many servers were very grateful for that.

Wage differentials, Madam Speaker, just breed a lack of awareness of how hard people work. It doesn't matter what the work is. If you're all working as hard, you should get the same amount of money. I echo some of the comments from my colleague from Calgary-Edgemont talking about the wage discrepancy between men and women in this country, which I have also felt acutely throughout my career. However, I will say that during this time that I worked as a server, my tips are what made the difference for me. They helped me pay rent. They helped me buy a car. They helped me go back to school to get my graduate degrees. They helped me survive and stay sane and so much more. I would not have been able to do those jobs if I wasn't getting tips or if my tips weren't protected.

I started serving in my early 20s when I was travelling and I needed to make some extra money, but it was always a job that I turned back to when times were hard, when I had a hard time finding a job, when my rent went up and I needed to make a second income to make ends meet. Serving was always there for me, Madam Speaker, and for me serving was a part-time gig. It was not my career goal. You know, grizzly bear biologist and everything was kind of what I wanted to do instead. But I will say that during my time working as a server, I met many career servers who required a job serving because those kinds of jobs gave them the flexibility that they needed for their family or to take care of children or aging parents or whatever they needed to support their spouse and their career. So there are many people who are working in minimum wage jobs as a career.

I'm sharing this with you, Madam Speaker, and with all the other members here because the members opposite seem to really emphasize that minimum wage earners are at the beginning of their careers or they're just young people and it's not for a very long period of time, and the idea is that you work minimum wage for a short period of time, and then you advance in your career. That may be true for some people, but it's not true for everyone.

The reality is that we are here in this House to represent the voices of all Albertans. So if we are going to have a debate about wages and the other people, the other members across the aisle are going to talk about how very few people in Alberta are making minimum wage, I don't care. Those people are making minimum wage. This bill could change their lives, and we are here to do that work.

The only reason I stayed serving for as long as I did was because the tips were so good, especially if you had the best shifts in the busy places. Workers deserve to keep those tips because they're the ones who have earned them.

One of the biggest changes that I've seen between the time that I was a server – admittedly, \$5.90 was a long time ago in Alberta's history – is the use of debit and credit cards and tapping and how not very many people are using cash to pay for bills anymore. With this technology the practice of tipping has also expanded to include coffee shops and other over-the-counter businesses that you wouldn't necessarily have tipped in the same way before. But what hasn't changed is how important and critical those tips are to the people who make them and protecting those tips. As the technology changes, Madam Speaker, our legislation should also change. We need to keep with the times.

Leaving my own personal story behind, this bill is fighting to put more money back into the pockets of Albertans. Today I represent

a constituency that is largely based on the tourism sector, and many jobs in the tourism sector are minimum wage jobs. They're servers. They're hospitality workers. They're cashiers. They're working for different companies, maybe only for a few months, maybe for a few years. A lot of people in the Bow Valley are making minimum wage, and whether they're making tips or not, they're trying to live in some of the most expensive communities in Alberta.

It is so frustrating for me, Madam Speaker, to hear the minister of children's services talk about how rent is going down. Well, I can assure you that in Canmore and Banff rent is not going down; it is going up. We are losing people in our community because of the lack of affordable housing, which I've spoken about in this House so many times. Let me go over that one more time. How expensive is it to live in Canmore? The average rent is \$2,000 a month and rising for a one-bedroom apartment. The median condo purchase price is \$700,000, and the median home purchase price is \$1.4 million. Our communities in the Bow Valley are so expensive that people can't afford to stay, and we lose them.

At the same time the people in our community who are making minimum wage are actually the foundations of our community. They are serving in the restaurants. They are making the coffee. They are making the beds. They are the cashiers at the Shoppers Drug Mart and at the Safeway, where people are buying their groceries on Friday for their weekend in Canmore. They are essential workers in our town. Our town would not be what it is without the minimum wage earners, and I am eternally grateful to every single one of them, Madam Speaker, because most of them are not working one job; they're working three. Three minimum wage jobs just to stay in Canmore. They somehow manage to be parents at the same time. I don't know how they manage to juggle that, but they are doing it. They're needing to work 60, 70 hours a week. That's not a life.

What if their minimum wage was higher? What if they could make just a little bit more money every month? Well, what that would turn into is more time to be in the community, in stores, sharing their new-found wealth with other businesses. We start to see that we can develop a community that is stronger and more active and more robust and supporting each other just by increasing the minimum wage and creating allowances for people's tips to be protected so they can rely on them for the robust economic contribution that they are. Wages have not increased under the UCP despite massive cost-of-living increases, and we now have the lowest minimum wage in the country. I'm ashamed and a little bit embarrassed by that, Madam Speaker.

I agree that being a small business is hard, and there are many costs to balance. One of the members suggested that we hadn't consulted with businesses on this bill. I would like to take an opportunity to correct that and say that we have consulted with businesses on this bill. I think one of the things that the members opposite neglect to consider is the business's reputation and how their reputation for treating their workers fairly can result in increased business. For example, there are businesses in the Bow Valley where management is keeping tips from servers, and as soon as that becomes broad public knowledge, the community boycotts those businesses. Those businesses lose a reputational consistency. People don't want to serve those businesses. Conversely, businesses that have a reputation for paying their staff well or having lots of benefits or distributing their tips according to how they've earned see more business in the local community. So it's not fair to talk about the cost to businesses without talking about businesses' reputation as well.

4:50

Tip protection is in place in seven other Canadian provinces. This is not some new, crazy, fandangled left idea. This is something that

most of the country is doing. Again, Alberta is falling behind because this government doesn't want to actually make the right choices. This bill will bring more money to the pockets of Albertans. It's a good thing for Alberta, it's a good thing for businesses, and all members should vote in favour of it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on Bill 201?

Member Irwin: Wow. Well done to that member. Impeccable timing there. I wish I could give you some more time to keep going because that was super informative.

I am as well quite grateful to stand and rise to Bill 201, the Employment Standards (Protecting Workers' Pay) Amendment Act, 2025. This is just truly so needed. I'm quite grateful to the MLA for Calgary-Mountain View for her work on this and, really, for all of those who came before us in their fight for better for Albertans. I also need to give a hat tip – no pun intended – to the MLA for Edmonton-Mill Woods. I was really honoured to stand with her and support her in Bill 210, which she introduced earlier this year, protecting workers' tips.

You know, talking about consultation, we can talk about just how many servers and folks working in the industry reached out to us and said how needed it was. In fact, we even filmed a video in a local establishment. They talked about how grateful their team was for us to be doing that work. Folks watching from home, you may not know that this UCP government killed that bill, Bill 210, almost immediately. What a slap in the face to those hard-working Albertans who were really hopeful, as was just noted by the Member for Banff-Kananaskis, that this would be passed by this government. Again, it's not this far-left ideological bill; it's something that a number of provinces, including Conservative-led provinces, have in place. So pretty disappointing, for sure.

I also have to note that I'm certainly so grateful to Rachel Notley and the NDP. I wasn't part of that government – we weren't, either – but I remember, and I know you do as well, my colleagues, just how proud we were to watch from afar when they increased the minimum wage. I don't need to tell all of you that that was in 2018 and that there has not been a single raise since. Now Alberta can claim that we're number one – number one – for having the lowest minimum wage in Canada. Is that the Alberta advantage that we used to hear about? That's certainly not something to be proud of.

I want to give a shout-out to my colleague from Calgary-Klein for sharing her story. I respect her passion so much and her willingness to share. Despite what one of the ministers over there says and does, despite his disrespect towards that member and to many of our members, I know that I can speak for all members of this side of the House that we're so proud to have folks like that Member for Calgary-Klein who have that lived experience and come into this House being vulnerable enough to talk about their own experience, their own struggles paying bills. Those are the types of voices that this UCP government needs to be listening to. One thing I never want to happen as an elected official is to feel like I'm so out of touch – right? – to not know what it's like to struggle to make ends meet. I'm afraid, I think, that there are a lot of members in this Chamber, at least on one side of the House, that are out of touch, you know, that aren't willing to stand up and speak in support of a bill that would help their constituents.

As was noted earlier by the Member for Banff-Kananaskis, the folks across the aisle we've heard say today, you know, that this isn't going to help too many people. The minister of affordability literally said earlier today: oh, it's only about 5 per cent of the population that would be impacted by an increase in minimum

wage. So what? That 5 per cent matters. They matter deeply. I represent a riding with the second-lowest median household income in the province. Those low-income folks, those minimum wage earners: they are people, they are our constituents, and they matter.

Let's talk about some of the specifics of this bill, Bill 201. In addition to addressing the minimum wage by raising the minimum wage to \$18 an hour by 2027, it also talks about tip protection, which, as I said earlier, is something that I was just so proud to support. It is a fact that Alberta is one of the only provinces that has no protections in place to protect workers' tips, and it means that some employers can, and they do – we've heard the stories from servers, from folks that work in the hospitality industry – take a cut of tips meant for staff. As my colleagues like the Member for Edmonton-City Centre have talked about, anyone who's worked in the service industry knows just how critical those tips are. The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud as well: I know you worked in the service industry a lot. This would just be, again, so life changing for some of those folks who are struggling with soaring costs all over the place, soaring rent, sky-high insurance, low wages, as we've talked about, and a pretty tough job market right now, let me tell you.

One of the things we talked about is that this is really common-sense legislation. Again, I would really love somebody on that side of the House to be able to stand up and speak to why they wouldn't support something that other Conservative-led governments have, why they wouldn't want to support those workers. Those workers don't all vote NDP. They're UCP supporters, too. Honestly, I just would love to hear what the justification is to not want to support servers and folks working in the hospitality industry.

I want to get on the record here before my time runs out that, you know, the UCP continue – I hate to predetermine the verdict on this bill, but what we've heard so far today from UCP members is that it's not looking good as far as support for Bill 201. Let us not forget that it was this UCP government that gave themselves a raise. They raised salaries, and they also voted to increase their housing allowance. You heard that right, for folks who might have missed it. Of course, there's a lot going on with this government. This is their strategy: flood the zone. If you missed it, this UCP government raised their own housing allowance because – and I was on that committee. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: I'm sorry to interrupt, hon. member. I'm having a hard time hearing the member who has the floor. If you would like to chat, perhaps the peace lounge is where you should be.

The hon. member.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I was saying, you heard that right. That UCP government increased their own housing allowance because – almost a direct quote – they were struggling with skyrocketing rents in Edmonton. Wow. Imagine that. Make it make sense. That minister will blaviate about rents and about his own inaction on rents, but that minister was part of a government that supported that increase to the housing allowance so these poor UCP members from out of town could pay their rents.

We put forward, as many of you know, a reasonable bill, Bill 205, the housing security act, that not only would have included rent caps but also affordable housing targets. Of course, just like every private member's bill that we put forward in this House, the UCP refused to support it. But what's as offensive as that is that the minister refuses to support an increase to minimum wage. He refuses to take action on rents. They refuse to incorporate rent caps. They refuse to increase rent supplements to the level needed. They

won't build the affordable housing needed, and now they're saying that they will not support a minimum wage increase. I'm begging that side of the House to talk about the tangible actions that they've taken to address affordability. I'm begging them to say how specifically they are helping low-income Albertans. They won't because they can't.

Today we're talking about minimum wage and we're talking about Bill 201 not because they want to talk about it; they've made it clear that they do not. We've got the lowest minimum wage across Canada, one that's been frozen since we, the NDP, increased it in 2018. What have we seen since 2018? Skyrocketing inflation. It's been six years, and Albertans are falling . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt but the time for consideration of this matter has concluded.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Alberta Separatism

501. Ms Pancholi moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly

- (a) recognize that
 - (i) Alberta separatism creates investment uncertainty and negatively impacts the economy, and
 - (ii) actions taken by the government that encourage or amplify separatist sentiment, including the work of the Alberta Next Panel, contribute to that investment uncertainty,
- (b) urge the government to
 - (i) secure a better deal for Alberta within the federation without leveraging the threat of separatism, and
 - (ii) establish stronger working relationships with other provincial governments to strengthen interprovincial economic ties and reduce interprovincial trade barriers, and
- (c) denounce Alberta separatism and express support for national unity.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in this House and introduce Motion 501, my first private member's motion in six and a half years being in the Legislature.

Madam Speaker, last May, as our country continued to be rocked by the betrayal and instability caused by the actions of Donald Trump and Canada's largest trading partner, the Premier made a clear and deliberate choice to once again prioritize extremist and fringe sentiments in her own party and prioritize her own political future over the economic stability and future of Alberta and Canada. The Premier did it by deciding that was the time to reignite and fan the flames of Alberta separatism.

The morning after the federal election the Premier should have been spending some time considering how her own pandering to Donald Trump contributed to the federal Conservatives losing what they believed was a sure-thing election. But instead of that kind of thoughtful reflection, no, the Premier decided instead to choose that moment to pander to the least patriotic of the so-called patriots, the ones who flew Canada flags when it meant they could occupy a city to protest the infringement of their fictional rights not to wear a mask but were ready to tear that flag down when the federal party they voted for didn't win and then remain silent when the UCP

overrode the actual fundamental Charter rights of fellow Albertans. The Premier chose to listen to a group of people who, in the most separation-friendly riding in the province, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, could only muster a sad third-place result behind the Alberta New Democrats in a by-election just two months later.

But these are the people the Premier is listening to and, let's be clear, is afraid of. So, because of them, the Premier and the UCP brought in Bill 54 to make it easier for separatists to force a referendum on the absurd and unrealistic notion of Alberta separating from Canada. The UCP lowered significantly the number of signatures that would be required and gave them longer to collect them in order to require a referendum on separatism. The Premier then used taxpayer dollars to launch her so-called Alberta Next town halls: government dollars used to create and platform propaganda videos; conspiracy theories; widely discredited misinformation about the CPP, RCMP, and tax collection; despicable anti-immigrant sentiment; and the Premier's staff treating Albertans, including a high school student, with disrespect and threats. And now the UCP won't even release the results from the wildly biased and inaccurate public survey they launched.

But here's the thing, Madam Speaker. This whole gambit isn't really about separatism or leveraging a better relationship with Ottawa. This is about the Premier trying to save her own political skin. It's about her always listening to the far right extremists in her party because she doesn't want her fate to go the way of Jason Kenney's. On May 7 this year, the Premier admitted that the real reason she's openly putting Alberta's separation on the table is for one reason and one reason only: to avert the emergence of a political rival. When asked why she didn't try to quell separatism by taking it off the table, the Premier said: if there isn't an outlet it creates a new party. And so, to keep her fractured and divided party together to stay in power, the Premier is willing to fracture and divide our province and our country.

But, see, the Premier and her UCP MLAs are playing a dangerous game because even the prospect of separation jeopardizes Alberta's economy. ATCO CEO Nancy Southern quickly condemned the Premier's promotion of separatism, saying: I think the discussion of separation should have no oxygen, and I believe Canada as a unified country is going to be far stronger than if we try to be independent little provinces. And it's not just future investments that are at risk in the event that there actually is a referendum on separation. As Nancy Southern also said: absolutely, it's impacting investments right now, as we look to have partners for our large projects that are from offshore.

From natural gas pipelines to hydrogen hubs, to any other major investments, businesses and investors need certainty and stability, and when the Premier of Alberta gives serious consideration to and platforms separation, well, that just breathes more life into that uncertainty. It may be one of the reasons that the Premier couldn't even find a private proponent for her pipe dream of a pipeline. Who will invest in a pipeline in a landlocked country of Alberta that would have to renegotiate access and transportation and trade agreements with other provinces, and, of course, also with the government of Canada itself, leave alone international trade agreements?

The UCP has already driven away billions of dollars in renewable energy projects, and separation would be the nail in that coffin. And how about those big data centres that this government wants to build? Why would any major investor look at Alberta as a place of certainty and stability for their investment dollars? What professional would bring their skills and talent here to Alberta when the future is so uncertain?

Madam Speaker, we only have to look at the experience of Quebec and Brexit in recent history to see how devastating and

limiting the prospect of separation can be economically. Montreal in the 1970s was set to rival New York as a financial capital in North America. But after years of a separatist Parti Québécois government and a separation referendum, well, we've all heard the stories of the over 350 major companies that moved their head offices out of Quebec. Others gutted their companies to only keep the shell but could not attract or retain employees. Professionals from health care to academics to research left in droves. For sale signs dotted the front lawns of homes all across Montreal. This is the established history of the economic impact of separatism in this country.

And just look at what has happened in the U.K. because of the breathless carelessness of politicians there who, driven by the same populist sentiment as the UCP, lit the fire of separation from the EU through Brexit. It has cost the U.K. billions as they struggle to renegotiate agreements, and the cost of goods has skyrocketed. Yet the Premier wants to invite all this to Alberta because she wants to keep her job. It is morally and economically reckless.

Even more fundamentally, Mr. Speaker, we are all treaty people. First Nations people in Alberta have treaty rights, which we all must uphold. The chiefs have been clear. The fact that the Premier and the UCP are supporting a separatism referendum in this province is not just an insult to First Nations people in Alberta, but it is a breach of treaty rights. First Nations have a direct relationship with the Crown, the federal government, that no province may disregard or undermine. Let's not forget that failing to respect Indigenous and treaty rights has stalled and even ended numerous major projects in this country, including pipelines like Northern Gateway. The economic risks of pursuing separatism and the inherent breach of treaty rights that follows is not a path that any Albertan should want to walk.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Separatism is simply wildly out of step with what Albertans want, and despite how the Premier and this government act, Alberta is still a democracy and its government must serve its people. Just last week the Forever Canadian initiative led by Thomas Lukaszuk mobilized over 10,000 grassroots volunteers over 90 days and collected signatures from half a million proud Albertans on a petition saying that they want Alberta to forever be part of Canada. These Albertans didn't need the Premier's gift of more time and a lower threshold of signatures like the separatists do. It is an outstanding and clear rejection of separatism by Albertans. It is an outstanding and clear rejection of the Premier's political agenda by Albertans. It is an outstanding and clear rejection of the UCP. Albertans are tired of and exhausted by the UCP's political rhetoric to just fight, fight, fight because the people across this country who the UCP wants Alberta to separate from are our family and friends. They're our customers, our employees, our trading partners, our fellow fans cheering on Team Canada, the Toronto Blue Jays, and the Edmonton Oilers. They are our neighbours, our fellow Canadians.

This motion is an opportunity for the UCP to clear the air and set the record straight. It is believed that there are members of the government caucus who have separatist views and support those who do. Let them put their name on the record to that effect. For the last few months, when asked directly about whether they support separatism, Albertans have been subject to a standard, carefully worded response from UCP MLAs. They will say they support a, quote, sovereign Alberta in a united Canada. This is word salad nonsense. It is talking out of both sides of their mouths and actually means nothing. To the extent that Alberta is sovereign over the matters in its jurisdiction, so is every other province. Every other

province has both exclusive and shared jurisdiction over those matters set out in the Constitution. If the UCP supports a united Canada, then they should have no problem at all supporting this motion.

The motion, Mr. Speaker, is incredibly clear. It recognizes that separatism is bad for Alberta's economy, as is encouraging separatism. It urges the government to do what Albertans want: get a better deal for our province with the federal government but without using the highly damaging and unpatriotic threat of separatism. This is an opportunity for the UCP to put this highly contentious issue to rest, to show for once that they are listening to the majority of the people of this province, to share in the values of their fellow Albertans, to join the Alberta New Democrats and proudly denounce separatism, to show that we are proud Albertans and proud Canadians and that we are all strong and free. I hope MLAs on the other side will have the courage of their convictions to show their constituents what they believe in and to support this motion.

5:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for — and I should know this, but I'm going to take a look here, my goodness, and there we go — Livingstone-Macleod. My apologies, hon. member.

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the MLA for Livingstone-Macleod, it is a pleasure to rise and speak today in response to Motion 501 brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. I'd like to start by making it very clear that I and my caucus colleagues have always asserted that we believe in a strong and sovereign Alberta within a united Canada.

While I appreciate the intent behind this motion to promote economic stability and unity, I cannot support it. Every member in this Chamber was elected by the people of Alberta. When taking our place in this Chamber we do so with the intent to uphold the promise that got us elected in the first place: to listen to our constituents and represent their voices in government. This motion effectively silences the voices of countless Albertans who are tired of being unheard by Ottawa.

Albertans are proud Canadians. This is no secret. We value our place in this country and have contributed more than our fair share to the prosperity of this federation. But we're not just Canadians; we are also Albertans. For far too long our province has been treated as a cash cow. Our industries, which support the country's economy, have been vilified. Our voices are constantly drowned out by a federal government that has more interest in appeasing central and eastern Canada than listening to the west.

Motion 501 implies that simply exploring ways to assert our province's rights or discussing how we could strengthen Alberta's sovereignty within a united Canada is somehow dangerous, that it creates investment uncertainty and will damage our economy. Well, I would argue that that is sadly a mistake. Uncertainty is being created by a federal government that imposes job-killing carbon taxes on a whim, arbitrarily blocks pipelines, and constantly interferes in areas that clearly fall under provincial jurisdiction. What creates uncertainty is a government in Ottawa that refuses to treat Alberta as an equal partner in the federation of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition raises this motion and singles out the Alberta Next Panel, which exists solely to hear the voices of Albertans and explore how Alberta can stand out for itself better within Canada. Motion 501 accuses the Alberta Next Panel of amplifying separatist sentiment. That's not only unfair but also inaccurate. Perhaps if the opposition actually took the time to listen to Albertans, they would recognize this.

The Alberta Next Panel is about finding solutions. It's about having hard conversations and asking tough questions to come up with ways to ensure a prosperous future for Alberta and the people who call this place home. It's about finding ways to protect our home from bureaucrats in Ottawa, who think they can dictate our future without any care for the values and needs of Albertans.

The Alberta Next Panel did not spring up from thin air. Let's not forget why it exists in the first place. These conversations are happening because Albertans are frustrated. They're happening because our farmers and small-business owners are burdened with red tape. Our energy sector is attacked, and our families are struggling under federal imposition. This is the lived reality for so many families across this province, and they are tired.

Motion 501 is redundant in its call to work to secure a better deal for Alberta within the federation because, Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what we are doing. Through the Sovereignty within a United Canada Act we are asserting our constitutional rights. This is not about isolation; this is simply a statement that Alberta will no longer sit idly by while the federal government disrespects our autonomy.

We are not claiming that we will no longer participate in this federation, but we will not remain passive participants. We are not threatening separation; we are demanding fairness. To imply that this government standing up for Alberta is somehow a threat to national unity is deeply troubling. It suggests that the only way we can be a good Canadian is to stay quiet, never question the status quo, and accept whatever Ottawa decides. This is not unity; it's submission. Alberta did not elect us to be submissive. They elected us to raise our voices and fight for them.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 501 makes an argument for economic stability claiming that separatist sentiment drives away investment, but we know what really drives away investment is uncertainty caused by federal regulations and punitive policies that target Alberta's most important economic industries.

It's true that investors want stability but also true that they want governments that defend their interests and create competitive environments. Standing up to federal overreach like we have with the Alberta Sovereignty Within a United Canada Act sends a clear message to investors: Alberta is open for business. We are committed to protecting our industries, our workers, our people, and our future. We will not sit idly by while Ottawa attempts to dismantle the very sectors that built this province, the very sectors that have contributed to Canada's economic success for years.

The fact that the opposition is more interested in backing down than speaking up makes me question how they can possibly claim to have Alberta's best interests at heart. I understand that some members of this House are uncomfortable with the idea of Alberta asserting itself. They worry about optics and how it might be perceived by other provinces, but it is not our job to manage perceptions. It is our job to represent the people who elected us, and those people are telling us loud and clear that they want change. No, they need change. They want a government that fights for industries that sustain them, a government that fights for pipelines and not apologize for them. They want a government that speaks up about unfair equalization payments. They want a government that will protect their families, their jobs, and their way of life.

Mr. Speaker, I reject the notion that talking about Alberta having a prosperous future is dangerous. I reject the idea that exploring options of how to further assert our jurisdiction is somehow un-Canadian. In fact, it is the most Canadian thing we can do. "True North strong and free" is quite literally in our anthem, to stand up for our rights and demand fairness to ensure our province is treated with the respect it deserves, to be strong and free.

Mr. Speaker, this motion seeks to shame Albertans for daring to ask the tough questions and fails to acknowledge the true source of

economic uncertainty, federal policies that punish our province for its prosperity. I will continue to stand with my constituents and countless other Albertans who believe in keeping our province strong, proud, and successful. I will continue to support efforts like the Alberta Next Panel, that seek to strengthen our province and empower our people within Canada but on our own terms.

Mr. Speaker, now that I've established why the work of the Alberta Next Panel is so integral to our province's sovereignty within a united Canada, I must point out that Motion 501 suggests that this work contributes to investment uncertainty. It is simply nonsensical, and given that the vital work of this panel is not yet complete, this Legislature is not in the position to debate the motion in full. Rather than vote on a motion condemning this important work today, I move, pursuant to Standing Order 8(4), that Motion Other than Government Motion 501 be moved to the bottom of the Order Paper, Motions Other than Government Motions. This will allow the panel to complete their important work, submit their recommendations to the government, and show Albertans and this Legislature what actions Alberta could take to strengthen our province and sovereignty within a united Canada.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. member, what was the standing order, please?

Mrs. Petrovic: Standing Order 8(4), that Motion Other than Government Motion 501 be moved to the bottom of the Order Paper, Motions Other than Government Motions.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, Standing Order 8(4) provides that
before the mover closes debate on a [private member's] motion . . . a
Member may move a motion, not subject to debate or amendment . . .
for the motion under consideration to be moved to the bottom of that
item of business on the Order Paper.

A motion under Standing Order 8(4) has been moved, and it's not debatable.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:19 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Arcand-Paul	Haji	Nenshi
Boparai	Hayter	Pancholi
Eggen	Irwin	Shepherd
Elmeligi	Kasawski	Sigurdson, Lori
Ganley	Kayande	Sweet
Goehring	Metz	Tejada
Gray	Miyashiro	

Totals:	For – 43	Against – 20
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[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Justice minister and Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I now move that the Assembly be adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday, November 4.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:37 p.m.]

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