



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature  
Second Session

# Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, November 5, 2025

Day 8

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

# Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

Second Session

McIver, Hon. Ric, ECA, Calgary-Hays (UC), Speaker  
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees  
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)  
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)  
Boitchenko, Hon. Andrew, ECA, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)  
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)  
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)  
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)  
Brar, Gurtej Singh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)  
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)  
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Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)  
de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)  
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)  
Dreeshen, Hon. Devin, ECA, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)  
Dyck, Nolan B., Grande Prairie (UC)  
Eggen, Hon. David, ECA, Edmonton-North West (NDP)  
Ellingson, Court, Calgary-Foothills (NDP)  
Ellis, Hon. Mike, ECA, Calgary-West (UC),  
Deputy Premier  
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Eremenko, Janet, Calgary-Currie (NDP)  
Fir, Hon. Tanya, ECA, Calgary-Peigan (UC)  
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., ECA, Calgary-Mountain View (NDP),  
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Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)  
Glubish, Hon. Nate, ECA, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)  
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)  
Gray, Hon. Christina, ECA, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),  
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Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)  
Hayter, Julia K.U., Calgary-Edgemont (NDP)  
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, ECA, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)  
Horner, Hon. Nate S., ECA, Drumheller-Stettler (UC)  
Hoyle, Rhiannon, Edmonton-South (NDP)  
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(UC)  
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Jones, Hon. Matt, ECA, Calgary-South East (UC)  
Kasawski, Kyle, Sherwood Park (NDP)  
Kayande, Samir, Calgary-Elbow (NDP)

LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, ECA, Red Deer-North (UC)  
Loewen, Hon. Todd, ECA, Central Peace-Notley (UC)  
Long, Hon. Martin M., ECA, West Yellowhead (UC)  
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)  
Lunty, Brandon G., Leduc-Beaumont (UC)  
McDougall, Hon. Myles, ECA, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)  
Metz, Luanne, Calgary-Varsity (NDP)  
Miyashiro, Rob, Lethbridge-West (NDP)  
Nally, Hon. Dale, ECA, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)  
Nenshi, Naheed K., Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),  
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Nicolaidis, Hon. Demetrios, ECA, Calgary-Bow (UC)  
Nixon, Hon. Jason, ECA, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre  
(UC)  
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)  
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Sabir, Hon. Irfan, ECA, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP),  
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Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP),  
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader  
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, ECA, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)  
Sigurdson, Hon. R.J., ECA, Highwood (UC)  
Sinclair, Scott, Lesser Slave Lake (Ind)  
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)  
Smith, Hon. Danielle, ECA, Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC),  
Premier  
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)  
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)  
Tejada, Lizette, Calgary-Klein (NDP)  
Turton, Hon. Searle, ECA, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)  
Wiebe, Ron, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)  
Williams, Hon. Dan D.A., ECA, Peace River (UC),  
Deputy Government House Leader  
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., ECA, Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)  
Wright, Justin, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UC)  
Wright, Peggy K., Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)  
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),  
Deputy Government Whip  
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)

## Party standings:

United Conservative: 47

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 2

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Vani Govindarajan, Parliamentary Counsel  
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Gareth Scott, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms  
Lang Bawn, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms

### **Executive Council**

|                      |                                                                                                       |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Danielle Smith       | Premier, President of Executive Council,<br>Minister of Intergovernmental and International Relations |
| Mike Ellis           | Deputy Premier, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services                                      |
| Mickey Amery         | Minister of Justice                                                                                   |
| Andrew Boitchenko    | Minister of Tourism and Sport                                                                         |
| Devin Dreeshen       | Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors                                                     |
| Tanya Fir            | Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women                                                         |
| Nate Glubish         | Minister of Technology and Innovation                                                                 |
| Nate Horner          | President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance                                                   |
| Grant Hunter         | Associate Minister of Water                                                                           |
| Brian Jean           | Minister of Energy and Minerals                                                                       |
| Matt Jones           | Minister of Hospital and Surgical Health Services                                                     |
| Adriana LaGrange     | Minister of Primary and Preventative Health Services                                                  |
| Todd Loewen          | Minister of Forestry and Parks                                                                        |
| Martin Long          | Minister of Infrastructure                                                                            |
| Myles McDougall      | Minister of Advanced Education                                                                        |
| Dale Nally           | Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction                                                    |
| Nathan Neudorf       | Minister of Affordability and Utilities                                                               |
| Demetrios Nicolaides | Minister of Education and Childcare                                                                   |
| Jason Nixon          | Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services                                                       |
| Rajan Sawhney        | Minister of Indigenous Relations                                                                      |
| Joseph Schow         | Minister of Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration                                                      |
| Rebecca Schulz       | Minister of Environment and Protected Areas                                                           |
| R.J. Sigurdson       | Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation                                                                |
| Searle Turton        | Minister of Children and Family Services                                                              |
| Dan Williams         | Minister of Municipal Affairs                                                                         |
| Rick Wilson          | Minister of Mental Health and Addiction                                                               |
| Muhammad Yaseen      | Associate Minister of Multiculturalism                                                                |

### **Parliamentary Secretaries**

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

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

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

Chair: Mr. Yao  
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Johnson  
Ellingson  
Kasawski  
Kayande  
Rowswell  
Stephan  
Wiebe  
Wright, J.

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

Chair: Mr. Wiebe  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach  
Boparai  
Bouchard  
de Jonge  
Elmeligi  
Hoyle  
Stephan  
van Dijken  
Wright, J.

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

Chair: Ms Lovely  
Deputy Chair: Ms Gohring  
Batten  
Getson  
Haji  
Johnson  
Lunty  
Sawyer  
Singh  
Tejada

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

Chair: Mr. Lundy  
Deputy Chair: Ms de Jonge  
Chapman  
Cyr  
Dyck  
Lovely  
Miyashiro  
Petrovic  
Shepherd  
Wright, P.

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

Chair: Mr. McIver  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Yao  
Eggen  
Getson  
Gray  
Metz  
Petrovic  
Sabir  
Singh  
Wright, J.

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

Chair: Mrs. Johnson  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Cyr  
Armstrong-Homeniuk  
Bouchard  
Ceci  
Deol  
Dyck  
Hayter  
Sawyer  
Sigurdson, L.  
Vacant

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

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Wiebe  
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Bouchard  
Brar, Gurinder  
Brar, Gurtej  
Getson  
Gray  
Sinclair  
Singh  
Stephan

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

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Lundy  
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### **Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship**

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Deputy Chair: Ms Sweet  
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Armstrong-Homeniuk  
Calahoo Stonehouse  
Cyr  
Ip  
Petrovic  
Rowswell  
Yao

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 5, 2025

[The Speaker in the chair]

### Prayers

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, let us pray. 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, please keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all.

Please be seated.

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** We've got a school group today. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What an honour it is to rise on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-South West and welcome fabulous grade 6 students and teachers from Kim Hung school. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

**The Speaker:** The Associate Minister of Multiculturalism.

**Mr. Yaseen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am happy to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the entire Assembly some of the former members of the Foreign Credential Advisory Committee: Bruce Randall, Deidre Lake, G. Nabi Chaudhary, and Kene Ilochonwu. Thank you for your dedication and hard work to help improve foreign credential recognition in Alberta. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Ms Sigurdson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two social work students doing placements in my office, Priyanka Thind and Marwa Belkadi. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Sigurdson:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you guests from Carbon Removal Canada, Na'im Merchant, cofounder and executive director, and Catie O'Neal, director of western Canada. We had an amazing meeting yesterday, and I'd like to congratulate them on all the work that they're doing. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

**Member Boparai:** Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Harmeet Sahni, president and cofounder of Cira group of companies – Cira group has been developing award-winning affordable housing and multifamily projects – and Karan, my classmate and friend from the last 25 years. I ask that they rise to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**Mr. Wiebe:** Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you the newly re-elected mayor of Grande Prairie, Jackie

Clayton. She's a tireless advocate for the city of Grande Prairie and our region. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The Member for Airdrie-East.

**Ms Pitt:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour to introduce to this Assembly no strangers to this building, in fact, two people that fell in love here in the Alberta Legislative Assembly, Benji and Andrea Smith. They're introducing their daughter to this Assembly for the very first time, four-month-old Caroline Laurie May Smith. Please rise and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Are there any more introductions? The Member for Camrose.

**Ms Lovely:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you representatives of We Together Strong Community, a volunteer organization that distributes free food hampers across the Edmonton area. The group has reached an incredible milestone of 25,000 hampers distributed during the Christmas season and made a meaningful contribution to the Jasper fire relief efforts. Their compassion and community spirit truly reflect the values we cherish as Albertans. I would request that the team please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Chamber.

### Members' Statements

#### 2025 Yukon Election

**Mrs. Sawyer:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the leadership of Currie Dixon and the Yukon Party following their decisive victory in Monday's territorial election. Yukoners have clearly spoken. They voted for change, electing a strong majority government and returning the Yukon Party to power after nine years in opposition. Most importantly they rejected the out-of-touch policies of the former Liberal government, policies that resulted in an economic downturn, a rise in crime, stalled housing projects, and higher energy costs.

Mr. Speaker, change in the Yukon starts now. Under Mr. Dixon's leadership the party won 14 of 21 seats, securing the largest caucus of any party in Yukon history and earning the highest share of the popular vote since the territory adopted a multiparty system. This is truly a historic moment. Mr. Dixon will become the 12th Premier and the first-ever born in the Yukon Territory. That's a proud milestone for Yukoners and a testament to his deep connection to the people and the community he now leads.

Throughout the campaign Mr. Dixon focused on the issues that matter most to Yukoners: affordability, housing, health care, public safety, and economic growth. His message resonated with voters who are ready to embrace a new path forward. United Conservatives applaud Mr. Dixon's commitment to strengthening the economy, supporting families, and restoring public confidence in government. These are values we share, and we look forward to working together to advance conservative principles and build stronger communities in the Yukon and Alberta.

On behalf of our caucus and the people of Alberta, I want to extend our warmest congratulations to Premier-designate Currie Dixon and the entire Yukon Party team. We wish them great success as they begin this new chapter of leadership and service to the people of the Yukon.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

## Bill 2

**Ms Sigurdson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1946 German Pastor Martin Niemöller wrote a now-famous poem. “First they came for the communists and I did not speak out because I was not a communist . . . Then they came for the Jews and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew.” And it continues. In today’s Alberta we could say: first they came for the teachers and I did not speak out because I was not a teacher. I could go on, but I think I’ve made my point. Who is next? Who will be targeted by the UCP to lose their rights?

The teachers have lost fundamental freedoms. In one day the UCP invoked closure, ensuring that all stages of Bill 2 were passed. Bill 2 includes the pre-emptive use of the notwithstanding clause. Speak to any constitutional scholar and you will learn that when the notwithstanding clause is used, it must have a full vetting by the public. It’s an act that’s extremely serious, to take away citizens’ fundamental rights.

In addition, MLAs were not given opportunities to fulfill their duties to examine legislation, bring forward their views, suggest amendments, and share the concerns of their constituents. I myself received hundreds of e-mails, postcards, and phone calls from teachers, parents, and students. The message from all of them universally was simple. Mr. Speaker, this is not democracy. How is this just? It is not.

I want to thank the thousands of Albertans who are speaking out against the UCP’s cavalier disregard for fundamental freedoms. Now, to paraphrase: first they came for the teachers and we spoke out because together we’re better.

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

## Official Opposition

**Mr. Lundy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’d like to take this opportunity to show just what can happen when someone gets too close and is sucked into the NDP’s socialist vortex. Let’s jump right in with an example. The NDP claim that the only way to address classroom complexity is through collective bargaining. But even their new leader knows that’s not true, having stated in this House during debate that he thought these issues could be solved legislatively only to change his mind and sheepishly apologize after he was run through the NDP Communist labour union ideological spin cycle. Trademark pending. Well, Albertans can look forward to a repeat of that story. The opposition leader’s previously self-identified centrist policies will get a fresh new Marxist perspective. Workers of the world, unite.

1:40

Let’s look at another example. As the mayor of Calgary the opposition leader made no attempt to call for or impose rent control in that city, presumably because he knows that disastrous policy would devastate the real estate market. But now, in his new gig, he supports rent control. Holy Bolshevik, that didn’t take long to switch from a market approach to supporting a policy that would create a government-controlled dystopian nightmare.

Finally, any previous sensible support for our vital energy sector and increasing pipeline capacity has mysteriously vanished faster than a political opponent being followed by the KGB. Add it all up and the pattern is clear: once the ideologues, union bosses, and Soviet-style revolutionaries that control the NDP get a hold of you, any common sense and reason simply disappears. The message is obvious: toe the line or else. Any intolerance will not be tolerated.

The opposition should just help Albertans out and give us a little truth in advertising and admit that they don’t currently have an NDP leader; they have an NDP follower.

**The Speaker:** Thank you. It’s a good reminder: we need to have caution when we’re making reference to individuals in the House and not groups on the other side. It’s a long-standing tradition. It’s okay to talk about this party or that party or that side or the other side, but we try to shy away from going after individuals.

## Premier’s Leadership

**Ms Sweet:** We are told to judge leaders not by their words but by their consistency, their courage, and their convictions. So let’s talk about the current Premier and the UCP government.

This Premier once said in 2022, and I quote: we must ensure every Albertan feels safe and respected regardless of gender identity. Now the UCP government pushes legislation that strips away trans youths’ privacy, restricts access to gender-affirming care, and forces teachers to out students to their parents. That’s not safety; that’s surveillance. It’s not respect; it’s rejection.

This Premier once praised teachers as, quote: the backbones of our communities. She promised to empower them. She even criticized Quebec’s use of the notwithstanding clause to override rights and once said that she disagrees with it. But now she used it herself to trample on and revoke the rights of teachers. That’s not principle; that’s political convenience.

She vowed once, and I quote: to remove barriers for people with disabilities. Yet the government has underfunded disability programs, ignored the duty of consultation, and left families scrambling for support. That’s not inclusion; that’s abandonment.

This Premier once pretended to support Canada, saying that Albertans must work with others to get results. But now they flirt with separatism, accusing others of unleashing a “tidal wave of laws . . . and political attacks.” That’s not leadership; that’s deflection.

Let’s talk about ethics. The Premier promised transparency and integrity, but under the government’s watch she let the corrupt care scandal erupt while allowing private health care companies with UC political ties to profit from their insider access and preferential treatment. That’s not accountability; that’s deflection.

So I ask Albertans: what does this government stand for? From where I stand, it’s not consistency; it’s contradiction. It’s not leadership; it’s opportunism. It’s not principled; it’s cowardly. Albertans deserve leaders who invoke with empathy, not abandon their values when they get power. They deserve leaders who protect the vulnerable, not punish them; who listen to teachers, not muzzle them; and who uplift the disabled and do not overlook them. We deserve better, and we must demand it.

## Health Services Procurement Process

**Mr. Guthrie:** Mr. Speaker, in the summer of 2024 Albertans got their first glimpse of something troubling. What began as a story about hockey tickets was never about hockey at all; it was about access, privilege, and the entitlement that takes hold when a government forgets who it serves. As the months passed, it became clear that this wasn’t an isolated event. Those offering invitations also received sole-source contracts from the UCP government with little oversight and even less competition.

By January that culture of entitlement reached the highest levels of the UCP, with the Premier and the health minister dissolving the AHS board on false pretenses. As the story evolved, I brought forward details of irregularities across multiple files, calling for a judicial review because, as minister, I believed that taxpayers deserved honesty. The initial reaction was cautious at best, but when evidence from the former CEO of AHS hit the courts, it was suddenly labelled a conspiracy. Then the investigations began: the

Auditor General, the RCMP, and, finally, Justice Wyant once the government relented. When the Wyant report was released, it confirmed what many already suspected: political interference, conflicts of interest, and a system of oversight that had completely collapsed. Mr. Speaker, what followed was not reflection; it was silence.

MLAs who once demanded evidence and now have it say nothing. There's a song called *Silent Lucidity*, a state of calm and knowing. What we are seeing and witnessing is neither calm nor knowing. It is silent complicity, a quiet surrender of conscience in exchange for convenience. To my former colleagues: you have asked for evidence; you have it. It's your move.

### Guru Nanak Gurburab

**Member Gurinder Brar:** When Guru Nanak Dev Ji came to Saidpur, two doors opened for him. One was from Malik Bhago: rich, powerful, dripping with show. The other was from Bhai Lalo, a simple carpenter earning with honest hands. Nanak chose Lalo, and Malik Bhago couldn't believe it. He asked for an explanation. Guru Nanak held Lalo's bread in one hand and Bhago's feast in the other. He squeezed. From Lalo's bread, milk flowed; from Bhago's food, blood dripped. Nanak proved that wealth without honesty is soaked in blood, and honest labour is respected by the Divine.

He not only travelled 28,000 kilometres; he engaged with philosophers, thinkers, and religious leaders. He collected and compiled their writings into *Adi Granth*, which we now know as *Guru Granth Sahib Ji*. He emphasized environmental protection. He called air our Guru, water our father, and land our mother. Mr. Speaker, who doesn't take care of their Guru, father, and mother? And when it came to women, he shattered the centuries-old beliefs. He said: [Remarks in Punjabi] "Why call her low, from whom even kings are born?" In a world where women were pushed to the margins, Guru Nanak pulled them to the centre.

If we want a just Alberta, a just Canada, a just world, we must walk in his footsteps. Earn honestly, share generously, and see the same light in every human being. Today, on the 556th birthday of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, I wish all Albertans a very happy Gurburab.

### Notices of Motions

**The Speaker:** The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Deputy Government House Leader.

**Mr. Williams:** Well, thank you, 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, Wednesday, November 5, 2025.

I also give oral notice of Bill 8, Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, sponsored by the Minister of Affordability and Utilities, and Bill 9, protecting Alberta's children status amendment act, 2025,\* sponsored by the Minister of Justice.

### Oral Question Period

**The Speaker:** The first question goes to the Leader of the Official Opposition.

### Public-sector Labour Negotiations

**Mr. Nenshi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a couple of hours ago health care members of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees voted 98 per cent in favour of striking. "Our working hours are long, our schedules are impossible, and our scope of practice has grown exponentially." This sounds oddly familiar. This government has

once again failed to negotiate a deal with critical public servants. What is the government's plan now to get back to the table and avoid a strike?

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

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have another four days of mediation with that particular employee group, and we're really hopeful that we'll be able to get a negotiated settlement, as we have done with 87 other unions. We know that there are some issues at the table. They have a wage demand that would in fact make them higher paid than registered nurses. While we, of course, value the important work that LPNs do, we have to make sure that our pay grid stays in sync with the kind of education that RNs have, and that's the reason why we're going to continue . . .

1:50

**The Speaker:** The Leader of the Official Opposition.

**Mr. Nenshi:** Hope is not a strategy. Indeed, that answer makes us understand that this government doesn't understand what's on the table.

Licensed practical nurses, rehab workers, operating room technicians, mental health care aides: these folks going on strike would be catastrophic for parents, for families, for people in primary care and hospitals and assisted living. Yet this government seems to have sleepwalked their way into yet another one of these situations. Is the government surprised that this isn't just about money again, or will they actually get back to the table and negotiate the things that need to be negotiated?

**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, once again, we haven't left the table. We are always open to having a negotiated settlement. It is certainly our preference. In this particular employee group 70 to 80 per cent of them are essential services, so a certain amount of service would have to be continued. What I am hopeful for, as we have had with 87 other settlements, is that we'll be able to find those areas where we can come to an agreement. I understand that they want to be able to maintain the same amount of pay for fewer hours, and unfortunately we just can't simply do that without having shortages.

**Mr. Nenshi:** I've seen this movie before, and it ended badly for the government the last time.

The real problem here with the teachers' strike is that the government was pretending not to listen and claimed to be surprised when they realized the strike wasn't about wages but actually about classroom conditions. Teachers told them that months ago, just as health care workers have told them this months ago. This government deliberately ignores these areas because they don't have any solutions. Is this government engineering another strike so they can once again use the notwithstanding clause, or are they actually going to bargain in good faith?

**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, we always bargain in good faith. There are certain things that have to be worked out after wage settlements are through. The education minister is going to have an announcement in the coming days about how we're going to address the issues of complexity in the classroom, aggression in the classroom. Part of that, of course, is having teachers at the table, but part is having superintendents at the table and trustees at the table, those with expertise in mental health, psychologists, education assistants. I think that the members opposite will be quite happy with what it is that we propose to be able to address those issues.

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

\*See page 213, left column, paragraph 6

**Mr. Nenshi:** You know, the government used to set up meaningless task forces in advance of crises; now they're setting up meaningless task forces months after the crisis.

### 2025 Municipal Elections

**Mr. Nenshi:** On a different topic, we've now had new mayors, councils, and school board trustees sworn in across the province. Congratulations to all of them, and sorry about the elections, the most chaotic elections with the worst voter turnout in Alberta's history; people lining up for hours in the cold to fill out a ridiculous form. Results took hours to come in, a direct result of this government meddling in things they don't know about. Will the government commit today to repeal the municipal elections laws that caused all this trouble?

**Ms Smith:** No, Mr. Speaker. The federal government has been able to manage election after election, to be able to hold national campaigns and national ballot counts. Having a paper ballot is a tried-and-true way of making sure that people feel confident in the outcome of an election. We're going to be applying that at the provincial level. We'll be applying it at the municipal level. I'm hopeful that next time around the municipalities will do some investigation about what caused some of the issues and they'll be able to do a better job of implementing those policies.

**Mr. Nenshi:** The municipalities don't need to do an investigation of what caused the problem. What caused the problem was the UCP government once again meddling in things they don't know about.

We're talking about this government's negligence. They say hand counting is more accurate. We just heard that from the Premier. But there was a 600-vote error – she may not have heard about this – that changed the result in Edmonton. There's never been that kind of an error in the past under the old system. Will this government finally stop pandering to conspiracy theorists and allow municipalities to choose the best system for their communities?

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

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was discovered on validation, which says to me that the process worked. I think Edmonton has some additional work that they have to do. They had 200 workers they hired who didn't show up. They had issues that happened in Edmonton that did not happen in other municipalities. We have 320 municipalities. The vast majority of them, I think over 300, have been doing a hand count of paper ballots. We know that when you have a recount and a very close contest, that's when having a paper ballot matters the most, and that's why we're going to stick with the process.

**Mr. Nenshi:** This government has systematically shown its disrespect for municipal elected officials, stripping them of their powers, imposing tens of millions of dollars in additional costs on the property tax base not just for elections, repealing their codes of conduct, backpedaling on major infrastructure projects, and having no solution for the hundreds of millions of dollars in unpaid oil and gas property taxes. Now we hear members of the government muse about getting involved in bike lanes and sign bylaws. This is a government forever telling others to stay in their lane. When will they respect local ...

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

**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, we've had a collaborative relationship with all of our municipalities and in particular the big cities of

Edmonton and Calgary. We fixed the problem of the green line that that member opposite created when he was mayor, not being fully truthful about what the cost of that project was going to be. That's part of the reason why we had to step in and help.

**Ms Gray:** Point of order.

**Ms Smith:** The failure of the event centre as well under his watch: we got that back on track. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that we spent a lot of time fixing the member opposite's mistakes.

**The Speaker:** A point of order was noted at 1:56 p.m.  
The Leader of the Official Opposition.

**Mr. Nenshi:** If only the Premier spent any time fixing her own mistakes or taking responsibility for them.

### Election Recall Petitions

**Mr. Nenshi:** Her definition of collaboration just there makes a lot of sense. We have a government that is falling apart at the seams by the minute: more and more recall petitions, crashing support, extraordinary dissension in her own ranks. Yesterday we had a minister imply that recall legislation should only be for criminal actions – I mean, I guess they would know – but that's not what the legislation actually says. Does the government intend to recall its own recall legislation now that Albertans are after them?

**Mr. Amery:** Point of order.

**The Speaker:** A point of order was noted at 1:57 p.m.  
The hon. Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, as the members who are organizing the recall campaigns were calling to overthrow the government, I can tell you that that kind of language does not say to me that they're engaging in the recall process in good faith.

That being said, we have absolute confidence that as we work through the issues with the teachers, we'll be able to identify the concerns that they have ... [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, you already know what the next thing I'm going to say is. We heard the question; we need to hear the answer. Let's make that possible, shall we?

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll be able to work through the issues one at a time. We had delegated the responsibility for managing the school system to the school boards. They obviously need some assistance in being able to address issues of complexity, so we're going to be having a much broader task force.

**Mr. Nenshi:** I think the Premier had a little glitch there and answered an entirely different question; not well.

Look, Albertans are wondering what rights this government will trample on next, what freedoms they will take away next, and this government is worrying about who will be recalled next. One minister has said publicly that there are no changes to recall legislation being contemplated. Another minister has communicated with his constituents, saying: we're getting rid of the recall legislation. Another minister yesterday stood up and said that the recall is only for criminal acts, which is not what it says. Which is it?

**Ms Smith:** Well, Mr. Speaker, it's not meant to overthrow and topple governments mid-term. Normally what happens is you wait for a general election to be able to have the record of government

tested, and that will be a time that we'll be able to have that discussion. I don't believe that the recall petitions have been entered into in good faith. That being said, there is no legislation on the table at the moment to make any changes, so the members are going to wait and see if any of these petitions end up getting the number of signatures, and then we'll deal with it at that time.

**Mr. Nenshi:** The Premier claims to love direct democracy but then treats citizens who use it with the contempt that we just heard right now. This government, despite its name, is anything but united. This is a government that claims to believe in freedom but takes away rights using the notwithstanding clause. They claim to be fiscally responsible, but they're the highest spending government in history. They claimed to fix health care in 90 days, but after a thousand it has never been worse. Now the Premier says that citizens engaging in democracy using her act are contemptuous and overthrowing the government. How can Albertans trust anything this government says?

2:00

**Ms Smith:** Well, Mr. Speaker, they're saying that they're trying to overthrow the government. That's what the people who are leading the recall efforts are trying to say . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Hon. members.

**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, we have had an extraordinary influx of newcomers coming into our province, 150,000 per year for the last three years, 450,000. Obviously, when you see an increase in the demand for schools, for teachers, for health care, for social supports, of course you're going to have to increase spending to be able to match that. We have a responsible budget, and we're going to continue meeting the needs of Albertans.

### Auditor General's Investigations

**Ms Gray:** Mr. Speaker, the government used their majority at committee to end the Auditor General's contract. That's the Auditor General who is now scrambling to finish investigations into multiple issues, including the corrupt care scandal, the scandal which saw hundreds of millions of tax dollars spent on companies owned by friends of this government. This after the government repeatedly refused full public inquiries. To the Premier: will the government grant the Auditor General the time and the funds that he requires to complete his investigations into this government's corruption?

**Mr. Williams:** Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to answer any questions that have to do with government policy. This decision was one made by members of that committee. That committee decided to not renew the contract, which had elapsed. That is normal. Every single Auditor General in Alberta history . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Members, I didn't have any trouble hearing the question. Please allow everybody here the same courtesy for the answer.

**Mr. Williams:** Mr. Speaker, the dictatorial instinct from the members opposite and the Leader of the Opposition to tell the Assembly committee what it must do is not this government's instinct. We believe that committee has the right to make its own decisions on what it does, and it's made the reasonable decision to say that that office is well funded, that it will continue to do the investigations, that they have employees that will continue after the transition . . .

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

Hon. member, if you're going to ask about a committee, please connect it to government policy.

**Ms Gray:** Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. The majority government has majority members on these committees, and they have used those members exactly the same way in the past. They fired the Election Commissioner while he investigated their leadership candidate scandal. They refused to extend the Ethics Commissioner's contract after she found the Premier breached the Conflict of Interest Act. This week they also denied funding to Elections Alberta necessary to process recalls, their own legislation. To the Premier: why is this government dead set against transparency, accountability, and answering for your decisions?

**Mr. Williams:** Mr. Speaker, again, these are decisions made by the Assembly. I'm happy to give members opposite a tutorial when it comes to civics within the Legislature. The Assembly gets to decide not only the members that sit on the committee but also votes on its own decisions. It made a decision as a committee to say that they would not renew the contract when it elapsed. We thanked Mr. Wiley for his work. We thanked him for the eight years of service that he had. That investigation, all the investigations under way will continue in that office as the transition continues, as the search committee is established by the committee within the Assembly.

**Ms Gray:** Mr. Speaker, I can tell you Albertans are sick of the misdirection that this government continues to put forward. Albertans want a government that uses Alberta's ample resources to fund things like high-quality education, not one that wastes money on friends and insiders. Under this UCP government our education has gone from first to last. Our health care is in shambles. Albertans expect and deserve better, but all they get are broken services and fat contracts for UCP friends and insiders. To the Premier: when will you apologize for the corruption and failing to deliver basic services?

**Mr. Williams:** Mr. Speaker, this government stands on our record and we compare it to the NDP term, where we saw them driving Albertan businesses and Albertan residents out of the province in an attempt to try and call us the embarrassing cousin of Confederation. We believe in the prosperity of this province, and we think that the future of Alberta relies on a conservative program that continues to provide opportunities for Albertans going forward. Members opposite, for the record, Albertans chose over and over again in an election to put Conservatives in power for a reason.

**The Speaker:** Okay. The next set of questions with no preamble on the supplementaries goes to Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

### Minimum Wage Rate

**Member Irwin:** Alberta has the lowest minimum wage in Canada. What an absolute shame. Alberta is one of the only provinces with a youth minimum wage. What a shame. Alberta is one of the only provinces where workers have no tip protections. What a shame.

These facts are all indeed shameful, but do I have good news. The UCP can vote for Bill 201, which will address all of these issues. So, easy question: will this government support workers and pass our bill? Just say yes and do the right thing.

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

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Roughly 95 per cent of workers in Alberta are earning more than the minimum wage under

our government, and we're very proud of that. In fact, under the NDP the number of minimum wage-earning workers rose from 2.2 per cent when they took office to over 11 and a half per cent in 2019. They also cost 21,000 youth workers their jobs. That's their reckless behaviour; that's not something that we're going to repeat . . .

**Mr. Nenshi:** No matter how many times you say it, it's still made up.

**Mr. Hunter:** Point of order.

**Mr. Neudorf:** Minister, these are the facts.

The NDP can make up whatever numbers they want, but the truth is that 137,000 women. . .

**The Speaker:** A point of order was noted at 2:07 p.m.  
The hon. member.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the UCP and that minister won't listen to research, to poverty reduction organizations, or even listen to businesses that support a minimum wage increase, maybe they will listen to Albertans: like Alexi, working two jobs, making a dollar over minimum wage, and living with three other people, yet barely making enough to cover groceries, rent, or utilities; or Brittany, a single parent in Lethbridge-East who makes just above minimum wage, works two jobs, and even with a roommate struggles every single month. To that minister of affordability who represents Brittany and so many like her who are struggling: will he support an increase to Alberta's minimum wage?

**Mr. Neudorf:** Unlike the NDP, we are going to consult with the employers and the employees that are most affected by this minimum wage. In September the NDP admitted that they have done zero minimum wage consultation and have no intention of doing so. If the NDP were going to bring forward legislation, they should talk to those business owners that are going to be impacted most. Our government is balancing the needs of Alberta's workforce to ensure that businesses are not burdened with higher costs that put their staff members' jobs at risk. It is highly concerning to see the opposition act in the same way they did as government, which took thousands of youth jobs out of the . . .

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

**Member Irwin:** Given that what's highly concerning is this minister's inability to listen to his constituents and given that young people are also struggling to make ends meet especially since, due to this UCP government's cruel policies, they make a minimum wage lower than their adult counterparts. Young people like Julie and Lilia, 17-year-olds living in Strathmore, told me how hard it is to make less than \$15 an hour as they try to save for postsecondary costs like tuition and housing. Will the minister once and for all do the right thing, protect workers' paycheques, and pass the bill that will eliminate the youth minimum wage and will raise minimum . . .

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

**Mr. Neudorf:** It's our government's intention to protect youth jobs. They would rather have a job at all than what the NDP did, which is drove 21,000 youth out of work. In fact, that is also why we brought forward the Alberta youth employment incentive so that employers in Alberta can hire 2,500 more youth, supporting that by our government's \$8 million investment this year alone. It's also why we cut taxes so that the lowest income earners can save another

\$750 a year. We are looking out for Albertans, we're serving their needs, and we're making sure that we do it right.

**The Speaker:** The next set of questions goes to the Member for Grande Prairie.

## 2:10 Upper Smoky Subregional Plan

**Mr. Dyck:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Northern Alberta has all the components to continue to grow the economy by attracting investment in our energy, agriculture, forestry, and many other sectors, all while continuing to sustainably manage our environment. While responsible industry succeeds, we all succeed for a stronger Alberta. This government has announced the implementation of the new Upper Smoky Subregional Plan, which is a fancy, governmenty way of saying that we have a plan to responsibly manage our land. Will the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas please explain why this plan is a good plan for both the people of Grande Prairie and northern communities?

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

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for this question, as I know it's a topic he's very passionate about. This plan is a good one for the people of Grande Prairie, Grande Cache, and northern communities. It's good for job creation and economic growth and good for the environment and habitats as well. The Upper Smoky area is rich in natural resources, home to diverse species, and supports roughly 85,000 jobs. The new subregional plan will protect those jobs and livelihoods in the area. It will keep people in the energy, forestry, and tourism sectors working, while supporting habitat restoration, responsibly managing the environment, and increasing wildfire protection.

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

**Mr. Dyck:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Even as production and energy reach new highs, the people of Alberta have an unmatched record leading in balancing environmental protection with responsible resource development. Can the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas explain how this plan protects our environment while supporting energy growth, and how it demonstrates to the federal government that Albertans know our province and are the best people situated to lead the way forward?

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

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Unlike the federal government and the members opposite, we are not putting ideology ahead of people's jobs and livelihoods. Over 12 per cent of the province's oil and gas production comes from this region, and of course production is set to rise in the years ahead. This plan will let us continue increasing energy production in the region while reducing our environmental footprint. We're leading the way in stewardship and conservation, proving once again that we can grow the economy, increase energy production, and protect the environment and critical habitats all at the same time.

**The Speaker:** The member.

**Mr. Dyck:** Excellent. Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now given that people in my community work incredibly hard to protect our land base and our forests and are responsible environmental stewards of this across industries, and we care about all species, including caribou, particularly in regions rich in natural resources

like south of Grande Prairie and northwestern Alberta, can the minister of environment tell this Assembly how this plan is going to advance and protect caribou habitat while supporting sustainability and expansion of industries that invest in our northern communities that support our families?

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

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We can conserve and steward our environment while also protecting jobs and the economy. It doesn't have to be an either/or conversation, and we're showing exactly that. This plan does more for caribou recovery than any other plan to date. It creates the first restoration targets for legacy seismic lines in caribou habitat, sets targets for reclaiming inactive well sites, and puts in place new reporting requirements to help track our progress. Under the NDP only 87 kilometres of legacy seismic lines were treated and assessed in four years of government. We've restored over 4,500 during the last five years alone, and we're not stopping there.

### Cancer Care Wait Times

**Mr. Kasawski:** Mr. Speaker, it's Movember, which reminds us that there are things men need to know and do when it comes to our health: stay connected, keep moving, and know the numbers. By age 45 men should be talking to the doctor about the risk for prostate cancer, because cancer can't wait. It's recommended that if diagnosed, surgery should happen within three to 12 weeks, but surgical wait times in Alberta for prostate cancer are more than 10 months for many men. That is putting men's lives at risk. To the minister: why haven't wait times for prostate cancer surgery gotten shorter?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister for hospitals.

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Excellent question from the member opposite. One of the reasons is that we're able to detect more cancer, and we're able to treat it in additional ways, and our population has been rapidly growing. Those aren't excuses; those are simply drivers behind the high demand for cancer services. That's why we're hiring 70 oncologists, 115 clinical operations staff, and 35 hospitalists to strengthen cancer care across Alberta. These additions will expand capacity, improve patient access, and ensure what the member is talking about, that those wait times come down, which they will.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Kasawski:** Given we all have men that we love, but too many are dying before their time for health reasons that are largely preventable if treated early, given an Alberta man diagnosed in mid-October with prostate cancer is going to have to wait until February for his biopsy, given after that biopsy he's still going to have to contend with the UCP government long wait times before he even starts treatment for that prostate cancer, when will the government finish shuffling the health care management deck chairs and start lowering the times for prostate cancer treatment?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, as I highlighted yesterday, we have increased our surgical programming related to cancer. We're doing 8 per cent more cancer surgeries this year, and of course we built the Arthur J.E. Child comprehensive cancer centre in Calgary to greatly expand access and capacity in the system. We're also looking right now at opportunities to bring

proton beam therapy to Alberta. Currently we're sending a handful of patients to the United States at great cost and great logistical challenges to their families for this proton beam therapy, and we'd like to bring it here to Alberta.

Thank you.

**Mr. Kasawski:** Given that we lost a good man in July, Ray Provencher – he was diagnosed at 49 and died when he was 52 from prostate cancer – given that the health system delays to treat his cancer potentially contributed to Ray dying long before his time, given that in Movember we can all support a Mo Bro, help raise funds for men's health in memory of those we've lost and in hope that we can improve the health care system for those that are still alive, when will this government start investing in reducing wait times for prostate cancer care so that Albertans aren't left alone to fund raise for the very care that they deserve?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that more must be done to reduce cancer wait times so that every Albertan can receive their treatment within clinically recommended timelines. That's one of the reasons we announced a partnership with Siemens Healthineers and the Alberta Cancer Foundation to invest \$800 million in our health care system. This funding will replace and update oncology treatment equipment, leverage artificial intelligence, create two centres of excellence in cancer care, and establish a medical research and innovation fund to attract and retain the talent that are needed to do the surgeries and reduce those wait times.

Thank you again to the member for his thoughtful question.

### School Construction in Edmonton

**Mr. Gurtej Brar:** Mr. Speaker, getting accepted to school should never feel like winning a lottery, but in my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie the only way kids get admission to school is through a lottery. Why has this government failed to act in time and build more schools for growing communities like in Edmonton? How long will it take this government to build the schools that kids and families in my constituency desperately need?

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Mr. Speaker, over the past couple of years we've seen a dramatic boom and increase in our population, and we're working aggressively to build the schools that are needed in every corner of our province. That's why our government has announced the schools now initiative to build and renovate 130 schools across the province, an \$8.6 billion commitment. More specifically with respect to Edmonton-Ellerslie, we recognize the challenge that the member's constituents are facing, and I'm happy to report that we are indeed building a new K to 9 school in his community that'll help alleviate the concerns.

**Mr. Gurtej Brar:** Given that parents in my constituency and across Alberta expect their children to get world-class education but given that kids in our schools are forced to learn in crowded hallways, libraries, and gymnasiums and given that kids deserve to learn in small classrooms with enough teachers and schools close to their home in their communities, when will this government end the chaos in public education, do its job, and build more schools?

**Mr. Nicolaides:** As I mentioned a moment ago, Mr. Speaker, we're doing exactly that. In fact, the specific project that I mentioned in the member's riding was actually a project that we were able to accelerate as a result of changes this government has made to the

process in which school projects are approved. As a result of this government's quick action, the school will be built in the member's constituency a lot faster than originally planned. We recognize, of course, the challenges that his constituents are facing, and our government is taking action to get the job done. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** I really appreciate everybody's interest in the answer. Let's just make sure we can hear it more easily next time, please.

**Mr. Gurtej Brar:** Given that under the UCP government Alberta has the lowest per-student funding in the entire country and given that according to the Alberta Teachers' Association the UCP's budget fell almost a billion dollars short of what's needed and given that the UCP has also failed to build schools in our communities, when will this government stop focusing on corruption? When will they start building and funding schools that are so needed in our communities? [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Is that fun? Okay.

2:20

**Mr. Nicolaides:** It is fun.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the school construction accelerator program, as I mentioned, is working to build and renovate 130 schools across the province. That specific school, the K to 9 school that's part of Edmonton Catholic school division, has been accelerated as a result of the new process that we've outlined. This will add capacity for about 950 students. The project is moving forward aggressively. We are absolutely committed to building the schools that our province needs as a result of the significant influx of new people choosing our incredible province.

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

### Capital Projects in Chestermere-Strathmore

**Ms de Jonge:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Chestermere-Strathmore continues to experience rapid residential, commercial, and industrial growth, which is placing significant pressure on local road networks and regional transportation corridors. Supporting and expanding road infrastructure to the east of Calgary is critical to ensuring this region remains open for business and accessible to residents. Can the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors share how our government is collaborating with constituencies like mine to ensure road infrastructure keeps pace with this growth?

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

**Mr. Dreeshen:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that very great question. We're actually building over 500 ongoing projects all across the province. Budget '25 actually has \$3.4 billion committed to road and bridge projects all across the province as well as municipal grants. Happy to see in Chestermere-Strathmore three major projects under way right now: the Glenmore Trail Rainbow Road, that's actually being delivered by Rocky View county; highways 1 and 791 interchange; as well as highway 1 and Conrich Road and Garden Road. The design work is well under way for all these important projects in the member's riding.

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

**Ms de Jonge:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. Given that the same rapid growth is also creating pressures

on local schools with rising enrolment and limited classroom space and further given that my region's relative affordability and small-community lifestyle continue to attract new residents, can the Minister of Education and Childcare share our government's plans to support new school construction and expanded educational capacity in response to increasing student enrolment and community needs in my region?

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

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, as we heard from the member opposite and now the member here, of course, adding capacity to our school system is a top priority for this government, which is why we moved forward with this historic and aggressive school build specifically in the member's riding. We have a number of projects that are under way. We're moving forward with a new K to 9 Catholic school in Chestermere as part of the Calgary Catholic school division. A second K to 9 school in Chestermere is under way as part of the Rocky View school division. As well, we're moving forward to replace the Westmount school in Strathmore.

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

**Ms de Jonge:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that the population growth placing pressure on schools is also straining local health facilities, including the Strathmore hospital and community clinics, and given that residents are experiencing longer wait times for family doctors and preventative services, can the Minister of Hospital and Surgical Health Services share how our government is improving access to primary care services and hiring more health care professionals to meet the growing needs of Chestermere-Strathmore and surrounding communities?

**The Speaker:** The minister of hospitals.

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for her question. To meet the growing health care needs in Chestermere-Strathmore and other rural communities, our government launched the \$16 million rural and remote family medicine resident bursary. This initiative supports medical residents who commit to practising in underserved areas. We're already seeing results. In Chestermere two new family doctors have been added, representing a 15 per cent increase. In Strathmore three new doctors have joined the community. These gains are part of our broader effort to bring 90 new family doctors to rural Alberta by 2027. Alberta now has a record 12,769 physicians, with over 600 added in the past year alone.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

### Education Funding

**Mr. Deol:** A few days ago kids returned to their classes when this government forced teachers back to work. Did they return to magically improved conditions? No, Mr. Speaker. Instead, teachers and kids are stuck in the same overcrowded, unfunded schools that demonstrate this UCP's failed approach to education. When will the minister of education start cleaning up the mess they have made by actually reducing class sizes and funding students properly?

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we didn't create the mess, but we are working aggressively to build the schools that our students and families expect and deserve as well as making significant new investments into our education system. Over the past two years alone we've increased funding to education by approximately 10

per cent. In this budget alone we increased funding to the classroom complexity grant by 20 per cent to help address the growing complexity that we're seeing in our school divisions. As well, as I've mentioned in the two previous questions, we're also moving aggressively on building new schools.

**Mr. Deol:** Given that ridings like mine in south Edmonton are seeing rapid growth as new Canadians move here to help build our province and our country but given that this government failed to prepare in any way by investing in infrastructure, building new schools, or hiring more staff even though they had years to do so, to the minister: when will this government stop blaming immigrants and start taking responsibility for their failure and lack of vision to build the schools and hospitals we need?

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Mr. Speaker, that's absurd and, again, just another example of the type of divisive rhetoric that the NDP likes to use. No one is blaming immigrants, but I will stand and be on record to say that I put a lot of fault to the federal government for mismanaging and mishandling immigration. This isn't just a problem that we're experiencing here in Alberta. NDP Premier Eby has spoken about the challenges that the federal immigration targets have posed to his community. We're seeing these problems across the country. That being said, we are stepping up and building schools. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Oh, I can hear myself think. My goodness.

**Mr. Deol:** Given that our children are stuck learning in overcrowded classrooms, given that Alberta remains the province with the lowest education funding per student in Canada and given that this minister has had years to fix these and other problems in education, will the minister admit to Albertans that he has run out of solutions and must step aside to let someone else fix the mess in education?

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

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Later this week we will be announcing a new action committee to help address many of the challenges that we're seeing in our school divisions. Back in June, as well, I convened a team to investigate the state . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, all the private discussions: there are places for those. Here we try to only let one person talk at a time. Let's give that a try, shall we.

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's very hard for the NDP to do that, as you'll hear again.

That being said, in June we did create a committee as well to explore the state of aggression and complexity in our classrooms. We're working aggressively to address these issues, Mr. Speaker, and we will ensure that we get the job done. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Are we done?

Okay. Then we'll hear from and only hear from the Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

### Youth Employment

**Mr. Bouchard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are many young Albertans who are struggling to find work, in large part due to the federal government's current policies. Alberta's youth unemployment remains at 14.7 per cent. Thousands of motivated young Albertans are eager to work, yet they continue to face closed doors, not because they lack ambition but because they lack the

opportunity. To the Minister of Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration: what is our government doing to ensure young Albertans have access to meaningful employment opportunities?

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

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to that member. Our government is working hard to ensure that Albertans have the opportunity to build bright careers within our province. That's why we're investing in skills training and partnerships with industry to help young people gain the experience they need to find that success. This includes our new \$8 million youth employment incentive, and we continue to work to support business growth and investment so they can continue to hire. Our focus is on opening doors, creating pathways, and making sure young Albertans can build their future right here in Alberta.

**The Speaker:** The member.

2:30

**Mr. Bouchard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the Minister of Affordability and Utilities for answering on behalf of the JETI minister. Given that the Alberta youth employment incentive will support 1,000 businesses in creating 2,500 jobs for young Albertans and further given that this incentive will provide the opportunity for youth to build the soft skills needed to carry them into their future careers, to the same minister: what is our government doing to ensure young Albertans and employers are aware of the supports being offered as part of this program?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're promoting this amazing program by actively reaching out to employers, industry and association leaders, chambers of commerce, and postsecondary institutions to make sure they know that this support is available. We're also keeping the application process simple by helping businesses bring Alberta's youth into the workforce. Our goal is clear: create opportunities, build skills, and help young people succeed in our province. That's exactly what the Alberta youth employment incentive does, helping young people get the experience they need for long and successful careers.

**Mr. Bouchard:** Given that this incentive is in response to the federal government's complete mismanagement of immigration programs such as the temporary foreign workers program, which has created more competition for entry-level jobs, and further given that young Albertans deserve every opportunity to succeed and our government has an obligation to help them do just that, can the same minister outline how our government is working to balance immigration with the needs of young Albertans entering the workforce?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you again through you, Mr. Speaker, to the member. Our responsibility is to make sure that young Albertans have every opportunity to get that first job and build a bright future and career right here in Alberta. We're focused on making sure immigration supports our specific labour needs while protecting opportunities for our young people by setting clear priorities, working with employers, and ensuring training and hiring programs put Albertans first. We're creating the right balance by welcoming people who help our economy grow while making sure that young Albertans are at the front of the line for those opportunities.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

Now let's only hear from the Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

### Crime and Public Safety

**Mr. Shepherd:** Businesses across Alberta are paying more for security systems and security guards, for theft, vandalism, and lost business, an effective extra tax thanks to the UCP's ongoing refusal to take real action to address the roots of social disorder, a UC premium, as it were, on top of higher costs for insurance, utilities, and more. So to the minister of jobs, economy, trade: has he talked with the Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services about how his lack of action is hurting and costing Alberta businesses?

**Mr. Ellis:** Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the work that this government has been doing since 2019 to build the internationally recognized recovery-oriented system of care, one that has been recognized by Stanford, by Harvard, by Yale. I can tell you the work that we are doing is groundbreaking. We're going to continue to do it despite the members opposite, who only want to hand out tax-free paid drugs to people on the streets. Shame. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** We're going to try to get you 35 seconds, hon. member. Please go ahead. Let's hear the hon. member, and let's hear the answer.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Given that it's not just businesses; it's condo owners and residents, too – condo owners in Edmonton-City Centre are feeling the impact from people desperate for a place to keep warm or driven by addiction to steal – and given that these owners have been forced to spend tens of thousands to beef up security and keep watch for fires set by encampments in the river valley and given that's not the fault of the city or the police but of this government's failure to meet the urgency of the need for housing and supports for mental health and addictions, to the Minister of ALSS: why are my constituents having to pay for the costs of this government's failure to keep people safe?

**The Speaker:** We'll only hear now from the hon. minister of assisted living.

**Mr. Nixon:** Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government is investing a quarter billion dollars a year to help with the homeless challenges all across the province, has the most shelter spaces in history, significantly more than the NDP has ever done, the most affordable housing spaces in history, the best recovery program in history. And you know what that member did, what his party did? They fought to keep homeless people in temporary nylon structures heated by things that were killing them and exploding. I'm proud to report there has not been one fatality in the encampments since we took over the problem.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Given that it doesn't matter how many numbers this minister wants to throw out, the reality is right here in our streets and given that reality is that after . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Edmonton-City Centre: we should be able to hear that member right now, so let's try.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Given that the reality is that six years later, six years under this UCP government, social disorder is getting worse at the cost of lives, our local economy, safety, and vibrancy in our communities and given we can't afford to wait the years it will take for any of this government's so-called promised solutions to have any effect, when will this UCP government actually step up and treat this crisis with the urgency it demands and deserves today?

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

**Mr. Nixon:** Mr. Speaker, another day, another fake NDP crisis. The reality is that this government inherited a significant challenge when it came to encampments, made by the NDP, who wanted to hand out free drugs, force people to live in tents, and not give them care. But what did we do? We built a navigation centre, we built a homeless shelter system that is world renowned, is being copied across North America, because we took it seriously. We actually care about helping people. The NDP only care about politics and forcing them to sit inside drug dens. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Well, I'm sure the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity will be happy to be heard.

### Health Care System Capacity

**Dr. Metz:** It's flu season, which means that in our hospitals acute-care admissions will increase. But here in Edmonton hospitals are consistently over capacity. Health care workers treat patients in hallways, closets, and curtained-off spaces, and the UCP delayed and then cancelled construction of the south Edmonton hospital and are now only funding planning, rather than construction, of the space people need. What will this government tell the thousands of people and families who never recover from the delirium they acquire while languishing in hospital hallways?

**The Speaker:** Now let's only hear from the minister of hospitals.

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hospitals are ready for respiratory virus season, which is something we plan for every year. We expand capacity, so more beds, more spaces, more staff. The core of the member opposite's question is: do we need more capacity in the Edmonton area? Yes, we do. That's why we'll be bringing forward accelerated plans to build two bed towers, about 700 acute-care spaces in the Edmonton area, one at the Grey Nuns and one at the Misericordia. But there's more. We're also going to build a third bed tower at South Health Campus in Calgary, another 400 acute-care spaces, to alleviate pressures on our major urban centres, including Edmonton.

**The Speaker:** Thank you. I heard the question and the answer. Let's do more of that.

**Dr. Metz:** Given that up to 40 per cent of the patients in some Edmonton hospital acute-care beds do not require that type of care but almost 20 per cent of these patients have been there for less than a week and given that unnecessary hospitalization often leads to delirium, deconditioning, and mind-numbing sedation, which makes returning to active life much less likely, will the government accept that rapid access to community care can avert this condition, and will they follow expert clinician advice to help patients avoid ending up in our crowded hospitals in the first place?

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

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another great question and recommendation. The short answer is yes, we recognize that we need to do a better job as a system wayfinding people to the most appropriate care setting so they don't end up in our emergency departments or hospital beds when they actually require, say, continuing care or mental health and addictions recovery support. We have many initiatives under way. I'm working in collaboration with the Ministry of ALSS, and I'm pleased to report that our ALC patients are down 20 per cent in the Edmonton area. A huge

multidisciplinary effort across multiple ministries. We are moving patients to more appropriate care settings every day.

**Dr. Metz:** Given that social workers are critical to facilitate transfer of patients from hospitals to continuing care and given that the UCP is increasing chaos in the hospitals by transferring acute-care social workers to the ministry of social services, given that shuffling people is a ridiculous change that reduces the ability of hospitals to manage the coming tsunami, will the minister stop this ridiculous reorganization and put patients first, starting with patient-focused health care, a team approach that includes social workers alongside other health care workers?

2:40

**Mr. Nixon:** Mr. Speaker, social workers remain a critical part of the work that's taking place in acute care all across the province. The difference is that underneath the old system they were disconnected from the social services system and the community care system, which resulted in 80 patients last year living in hospital for a combined 225 years, not needing acute care. Proud to say those patients are moved on to appropriate service. We are working in partnership with social workers, in partnership with Acute Care to make sure everybody is in the right spot, which is why we are down 20 per cent on ALCs across the province.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, in 30 seconds we will be continuing.

**Mr. Williams:** Mr. Speaker, during Notices of Motions it seems that I may have stuttered during the word "statutes," and I'm asking to correct the record when I read the notice of motion introducing oral notice of Bill 9.\*

**The Speaker:** Please say the whole thing again to make sure that the record is clear this time around.

**Mr. Williams:** I also rise to give oral notice of Bill 8, Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, sponsored by the Minister of Affordability and Utilities, and Bill 9, Protecting Alberta's Children Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, sponsored by the Minister of Justice.

**Ms Gray:** Point of order.

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

**Ms Gray:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Apologies if a point of order is not the appropriate mechanism, but I'm curious. We have not reverted to Notices of Motions. What is happening at this moment, and is it in order?

**The Speaker:** Okay. Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, you need to ask for unanimous consent to revert to the previous section.

**Mr. Williams:** Mr. Speaker, I believe it was a stutter, but if that is what the dais is requesting, I'll ask for unanimous consent from the House so that the stutter can be clarified and say, "Statutes."

**The Speaker:** It's mostly what the standing orders require more than what the dais is requesting.

**Mr. Williams:** It's your interpretation, Chair.

**The Speaker:** It is what the standing orders say, not what the dais is requesting.

I think that probably answers the Opposition House Leader's inquiry, which was not a point of order, as she rightly pointed out.

Nonetheless, it was a legitimate inquiry. So that kind of answers your question.

What's before us now is the unanimous consent to go back to Notices of Motions.

[Unanimous consent denied]

## Tabling Returns and Reports

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

**Mr. Sigurdson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and table the requisite five copies of four annual reports for the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, including the 2024-25 annual report of the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation as required under section 15(2) of the Agriculture Financial Services Act, the 2024-25 annual report of Livestock Identification Services as required by section 90 of the livestock identification act and section 33 of the Stray Animals Act, the 2024-25 annual report of the Farmers' Advocate as required by section 42 of the Farm Implement and Dealership Act, and the 2024-25 annual report of the Alberta Agricultural Products Marketing Council as required by section 14 of the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Are there any other tablings? Looks like we have the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

**Member Calahoo Stonehouse:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to submit an official statement from the Samson Cree Nation and Chief Saddleback regarding their intervenor status in support of Onion Lake's challenge against the province of Alberta's provincial separation process because it violates treaty.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Yaseen:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy today to rise to table five copies of the final report of the Foreign Credential Advisory Committee in accordance with the Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act. We are very thankful to FCAC for their hard work on this.

**Mr. Guthrie:** Mr. Speaker, I made a procedural error. That procedural error caused me to not be able to speak to the point of order as I thought I had available to me on Monday, but I'm going to table the speech, the requisite copies that I had prepared.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

**Member Arcand-Paul:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I table the requisite copies of a letter from the Haisla Nation saying that they will not be moving forward with conversation with the Premier about a pipeline to their territories.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** I'm doing my best, folks.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

**Mr. Wright:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with five copies of an article highlighting the largest meth bust in New Zealand's history, with all the drugs originating at Canadian manufacturing facilities.

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

\*See page 205, left column, paragraph 10

**Ms Sigurdson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I received hundreds of postcards in my office from teachers describing the abysmal conditions in classrooms across Alberta. I have the requisite copies.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.  
Calgary-Edgemont.

**Ms Hayter:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. One is from a constituent, Lisa, who wrote me an e-mail opposing Bill 2, saying that public education is not a luxury.

My second: I had spoken during bill debate and had read a passage from *The Pink Tax* by Janine Rogan, CPA, on page 7.

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

**Member Eremenko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite copies of an e-mail from a teacher who's writing on behalf of herself and her husband, who is also a teacher, talking about how they stay for the students, but they may need to leave for their own sake.

**The Speaker:** Calgary-Elbow.

**Member Kayande:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. One is a screenshot from the Alberta Economic Dashboard showing a 3.1 per cent year-over-year increase in CPI rent and no negative CPI rent increase since 2022.

Secondly, I have the five copies of letters from Margaret Patterson, Rachel Quapp, Thomas Smith, Graham Nelson, and Nicole Borand begging the Premier to respect the human rights of gender-diverse Albertans.

**The Speaker:** Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you. I have a copy of an e-mail from a constituent of Edmonton-Strathcona who is urging the UCP government to consider rent caps and to address the urgent housing crisis that is happening in Alberta.

**The Speaker:** Edmonton-Glenora.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a letter that relates to a question asked today by the Member for Sherwood Park around prostate cancer wait times. This constituent writes about her husband having an abnormal test.

**The Speaker:** Lethbridge-West.

**Member Miyashiro:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I apologize; I have a number of tablings today. First of all, I have the annual report from the Green Acres Foundation, the premier seniors' housing body in southern Alberta.

I have a number of copies of an e-mail to the minister of education and other people in the government calling the use of the notwithstanding clause "egregious, inappropriate and undemocratic," an e-mail from a mother in Lethbridge-West who's very upset with this government to not negotiate with teachers, an e-mail from a professor at the U of L who opposes this government's use of the notwithstanding clause, and an e-mail from a Lethbridge constituent expressing deep concern over the use of the notwithstanding clause.

And I have an e-mail from the mother of a 17-year-old in Lethbridge who decided not to participate in any high school sports this year because she would be required to document her sex, and her heart is breaking for all the girls this year.

**The Speaker:** Okay. Thank you for the tablings, hon. member. You know, I try to let everybody do it, but save the editorial for debate. This is not the time for debate.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

**Mr. Ellingson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the five requisite copies of an e-mail from a constituent and parent, Lisa, questioning the government's priorities for licence plates rather than fixing public education.

2:50

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

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have copies of one of the hundreds of letters from families talking about the inability to procure an FSCD contract.

**The Speaker:** Calgary-Klein.

**Member Tejada:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the five requisite copies of a letter from a new educator pleading with the government to invest in a strong education system that does not fail its citizens.

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

**Mr. Dach:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I definitely am for Edmonton-McClung. Today I rise to table the requisite five copies of an e-mail from Nathan Woodward, a constituent whose son requires one-on-one care and needs money invested in public schools to make sure that happens.

**The Speaker:** Are there any other tablings?

Seeing none, it is now time for points of order. Now, what have we here? At 1:56 there was a point of order called by the Opposition House Leader as I recall.

#### **Point of Order Allegations against a Member**

**Ms Gray:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I recall that as well. At 1:56 the Premier was responding to a question from the Leader of the Official Opposition. This point of order is under 23(h), (i), and (j). I do not have the benefit of the Blues, but I heard the Premier, in speaking directly about the Leader of the Opposition, say that he was not being fully truthful. I rise only because we have a long-standing practice of not doing indirectly what cannot be done directly, and calling people liars in this Chamber has long been ruled out of order. Assuming that I heard correctly and that is what the Premier said, I believe it's a point of order and should be apologized for and withdrawn.

**Mr. Williams:** Thank you. I heard the same thing. If the Premier did say that, then I apologize and withdraw on behalf of the Premier without reservation.

**The Speaker:** That was the right thing for you to do because I have the Blues and that is what was said. Thank you for that. That closes this matter.

At 1:57 p.m. there was a point of order called by the . . .

**Mr. Williams:** I don't know; you tell me.

**The Speaker:** Anybody call a point of order at 1:57? Well, if no one will . . .

**Mr. Williams:** There were two nearby. I just need to know which one.

**The Speaker:** Somebody talked about criminal activity or something.

**Mr. Williams:** If that was called by the Deputy Government House Leader, the Minister of Justice, we'll withdraw that.

**The Speaker:** Okay. That's dealt with.

At 2:07 p.m. the Member for Taber-Warner called a point of order.

#### Point of Order Parliamentary Language

**Mr. Williams:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. During that time the Minister of Affordability and Utilities was speaking and the Leader of His Majesty's Opposition was seated and shouted, to the best we could hear in the Chamber: no matter how many times that member says it, it does not make it true. On the very same logic of the previous apology that I issued on behalf of the Premier, I think it's appropriate, if you're accusing the member of saying something that's not true – you cannot do something indirectly that you cannot do directly. We would ask that the member apologize for the Leader of the Official Opposition.

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

**Ms Gray:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't have the benefit of the Blues, but if that was what was said, similar to the previous point of order, on behalf of the member I will apologize and withdraw.

**The Speaker:** I do have the Blues, and what was said to be said was said, and the proper thing to do is exactly what you did. You just apologized and you just withdrew. This matter is now concluded.

### Orders of the Day

#### Government Bills and Orders

##### Second Reading

##### Bill 3

#### Private Vocational Training Amendment Act, 2025

[Adjourned debate November 4: Member Ceci]

**The Speaker:** I think you have five minutes, hon. member. It looks like that hon. member won't be using the five minutes now.

Anybody else care to speak to this? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

**Dr. Metz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 3, the Private Vocational Training Amendment Act, 2025. My colleagues before me who have spoken on this have spoken about many of the issues that relate to this act and made a number of suggestions for improvement. There are a lot of good things in this act, and I think that the suggestions that were made would help to improve it.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

I'd like to take this opportunity to invite the government to seriously consider including non-UCP members in the development of legislation because I believe that more knowledge and perspectives can help improve many of these bills ahead of time rather than afterward, when we're coming to the debate stage.

I would like to speak to the guiding principles in this act. That is section 2(1), "This Act is to be interpreted in accordance with the

following principles," and it's really (a) that I'm going to speak to. It says: "Vocational training should align with Alberta's labour market needs and provide the skills and knowledge required by employers." That is, of course, wonderful and a good idea, and I totally support that. With regard to the labour market needs, however, I'm going to really address this to the health care workforce, which are very often trained in these institutions. I'm speaking today largely of people that are health care aides, dental assistants, medical office assistants and other required administrative staff, pharmacy technicians, paramedics, and addiction therapists.

There is a very urgent need for developing a comprehensive workforce plan in Alberta, and indeed we should be doing this in collaboration across the country so that we can pool our knowledge and resources and come up with a comprehensive plan for what we need, so that we're not going to have people we train swiped away by someone else because we're the only ones doing that correct training.

I think that what we need is to first establish what our needs are. We need to look at the numbers not only of bodies or persons, but we need to know the amount of work, the kind of work they're doing, what their equivalent FTE is perhaps, so that we can really flesh out what the needs are going to be.

We also need to have a very careful look at retention. Retention has been a big problem in many professions. We are training people but leaking the bucket on the bottom, so we have to train more and more people to fill spots temporarily. That has to be dealt with.

We also need to have a very thoughtful discussion, as part of building this workforce plan, about the needs and deficiencies of the training, about the complexity of the jobs as they are now. We need to include in that discussion all the varying professions within the health care workforce, for example, as that's the group that I'm speaking to.

In addition, we're at a stage in the health care system where we need to be developing team-based care. That means we need to review the scope of practice of all of the health care providers and review the complexity that they're dealing with. Any decisions about this will need to be based on the needs of our patients today and will need to be developed by members, associations, and regulatory bodies included with that group of career professionals.

This means that the curriculum of these private vocational colleges will need to keep up. Their curriculum will need to change over time. They will likely also have an opportunity to provide some upscaling programs, as previously trained workers may need that additional knowledge. Those current workers will need to meet the needs and be equally as trained as new trainees coming out. Curriculum is critically important in developing workers that can provide safe care and that have the required skills so that they can feel satisfied in their jobs.

Not only does that mean that Alberta has to have an appropriately skilled workforce, but these workers also need to graduate into jobs. We need to know how many we actually need. What requirements will be put in place through this act or perhaps through regulations to require that this input occurs on a regular basis and is required by the training institution to keep up with the needs of the group they are educating?

3:00

We must hear from the employers, regulators where appropriate, workers in the field perhaps represented by their associations. In addition, we should be discussing with the representatives of the graduated workers and with the workers that work in teams where the newly graduated person is going to join, because we need to understand the team care and what roles this person will take in a

team as well as assure that they are trained to work appropriately within teams.

This collaboration will help facilitate workforce placements by including the workers. We know that in many of the health professions the limit on getting more workers trained is inadequate placements or places to take the workers. I know for sure that that's a fact in medicine and in nursing. I'm not a hundred per cent sure whether that is actually the case in some of the other training that takes place in these colleges.

Another issue is recognizing that training is integral to worker retention. Many smart, dedicated, compassionate people will leave their profession if they find they cannot meet the challenges of the job. This leads to burnout and dissatisfaction with work. Retention is a major issue in many sectors of the health care workforce. Worker training can help to alleviate the stresses that often drive health care professionals out of their profession.

I will use the example of paramedics. There is a tremendous loss of paramedics within the first few years of their training, sometimes after their first or second shift. Paramedics are exposed to absolutely horrendous things. They see people at their worst. They see death in the most gruesome ways, and they get called to these and they're often not prepared for this. This can be the end of a person's career. Almost 20 per cent of paramedics are also off on disability, often due to workplace-acquired traumas of a psychological nature. They will often, as I said, see the worst things, and that will have such an impact that many of them won't risk continuing in their career and others will be off on disability. This is a tremendous drain on our workforce, to say nothing of the impact on those individuals.

Consulting with the profession, the regulators when appropriate, and often with groups that cover this across the country so we can learn what works in different places, working with our publicly funded polytechnics, working with the military in the case of paramedics, because they also train paramedics, will be important. I can say that these groups have developed and come up with a new curriculum for training paramedics that is expected to roll out over the next one to two years. This will enhance the training so that patients will get better care, and it will build the resiliency and the skills of the workforce.

We need to assure in this act that private colleges that are doing the training are keeping up with the changes of the future. Training also continues on. For paramedics there are many steps in this. The first level is an emergency medical responder, and that can be as short as a nine-month program; in our polytechnics it's a one-year program.

The new program will bring in many of the skills that will help people do their jobs but will also help build in the resiliency to keep people in their jobs. They'll be more competent, more assured. That will help the patients they serve. It will help them with job satisfaction and reduce disability. There will need to be ramping up of the current workforce to meet the skills that will be recommended. At this time it's not an expectation that we're going to replace the people that are there but to bring in a program that will build a more resilient workforce. We need to stop the loss of paramedics and the injury that they experience through the work that they do.

We need to assure that our workforce in all other areas, that comes from these private colleges, are also safely trained to continue their careers and to have a possibility of advancements. We need to assure that these private colleges will work with the other professionals so that the scope of practice is there and so that the colleges are aware of how these workers will fit within the scheme of the health care system.

I'm very concerned about the lack of workforce planning and would like to understand how that can be used, as it's stated in this

act and which I support. That basic need isn't really there at this point in time. In the past there was a little bit of workforce planning done by the ministry. Most of the planning that occurred was done in Alberta Health Services, but it really only related to the role that Alberta Health Services played. There was no real workforce planning on what we need outside of those areas, which includes home care, a lot of continuing care. It includes primary care. There really was no clear workforce planning in terms of the medical workforce. And while they're of course not being trained in these private colleges, it's an example of the lack of workforce plans.

We're also seeing that where there is both a private delivery mode as well as a need within our hospital system, there can be problems when there is a shortage of staff. For example, in Fort McMurray there is a major shortage of X-ray technicians, and Fort McMurray is not alone in that. The health system doesn't have the ability to recruit technicians the same way that the private sector can, where they can pay bonuses and for moves, et cetera, that are not available to the health care system. So the lack of a health care workforce plan gets us into this position where we have a very drastic shortage of workforce. We could have used that to train more technicians, but it wasn't there. We need to be looking closely at where we need the help.

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

Seeing none, the Advanced Education minister to close debate. That's waived.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a second time]

3:10

**Bill 4**

#### **Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2)**

[Debate adjourned November 4: Ms Hoffman speaking]

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. member has one minute left.

The Member for Calgary-Edgemont to speak.

**Ms Hayter:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand to discuss or to talk about Bill 4. This bill makes a series of amendments, and most of them are aimed at bringing a widely unpopular Alberta sheriffs police service one step closer to fruition. It also makes changes to the Disclosure to Protect Against Domestic Violence (Clare's Law) Act, most commonly known as Clare's law.

Clare's law allows individuals to find out if their partner has a history of domestic violence, helping them make a more informed choice about their safety. It is an important life-saving tool, one that I fully support and one that all of us in this Chamber should want to strengthen. This is why it is incredibly mystifying to me that the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services has chosen to tie these critical improvements to a bill that's primarily focusing on advancing a costly, unwanted policing experiment.

These are two extremely different issues. One is about improving safety for women and families, and the other is about moving forward to a new provincial police force, that 80 per cent of Albertans said that they do not want. By combining them, the government is politicizing women's safety. Support for domestic violence prevention is essential, but the support must stand on its own, not be used as a shield for a policing rollout that Albertans overwhelmingly oppose.

For those of you who may not know, Clare's law came into effect in Alberta in 2021. It allows someone who feels unsafe in their relationship to request information about their partner's history of violence. Police then conduct a threat assessment and assign a risk level. If there is a high or moderate level of risk, the applicant meets

with police in person to hear about the history involved. They aren't allowed to take notes or record the meeting or share information with their family or friends.

Bill 4 makes some technical improvements to how that information is shared and how the threat assessments are conducted, which is very positive in principle, but it does not expand education or support for women who decide to leave. Telling someone they're at risk means very little if there's nowhere safe for them to go, and the need for this could not be more serious.

In 2024 Alberta recorded 17 femicides, with most linked to intimate partner violence. While these improvements in Clare's law are important, they can't be used as a substitute for investments in prevention, counselling, shelters. We don't need to look far to see why stronger, better resourced domestic violence prevention matters. A little over three months ago 23-year-old Madisson Cobb was killed in Calgary. She had done everything that women are told to do. She had three court orders in place to keep her abuser away. She went to the police, she followed the process, and still she was murdered by her abuser.

Madisson's case shows what happens when our system focuses on paper protections without the funding and the co-ordination that turns those protections into meaningful actions. Restraining orders and information sharing can only go so far if there are no supports behind them, supports like safe housing, consistent enforcement, and follow-up. This is why tying Clare's law to a policing rebrand experiment misses the point.

Women like Madisson don't need more bureaucracy; they need a system that is funded to act when threats are known. They need shelters with rooms to take them in, trained officers who understand coercive control, and community programs that work with perpetrators before violence escalates. They need school programs that don't require an opt-in form to learn about healthy relationships. They need teachers to be in those classrooms, helping youth learn about respect and what boundaries look like. When a woman can have three restraining orders and still be murdered, that is a failure of policy.

If this government truly wants to honour women like Madisson Cobb, it would fund the supports that save lives instead of spending billions on a police force that Albertans don't want. Mr. Speaker, this bill, like so many from this government, is about choice. This government is choosing to spend \$1.3 billion on a provincial police transition, to forfeit another \$170 million a year in federal funding. That's more than \$2 billion over six years. That's money Alberta will never get back.

Imagine what that could do instead. It could fund FearIsNotLove's men's program, a program proven to reduce violence by working directly with men who want to change their behaviour. It could restore the funding for Indigenous-led safety initiatives like the circle of safety, which recently lost its funding halfway through the year despite its success. It supports women and families in rural and remote communities. When survivors of domestic violence can't find or afford a safe place to live, they're far more likely to stay in or return to dangerous situations. With \$2 billion this government could build or refurbish more than 7,000 units of affordable housing. It could stabilize funding for domestic violence shelters so that they aren't forced to operate grant to grant and turn women away when beds are full.

It could also support education, one of the most effective long-term violence prevention tools we have. Schools are a big part of where children learn about boundaries, empathy, and healthy relationships. Well-funded schools give young people stability, role models, and opportunity, all of which are proven predictors of low crime rates and healthier communities. When we underfund classrooms, we underfund prevention.

Mr. Speaker, these are real public safety investments that Alberta needs. When this government says that they can't afford these things but they can afford a provincial police service, that's a choice. Public safety doesn't come from rebranding police; it comes from addressing the conditions that make people unsafe in the first place. Violence, poverty, housing, mental health are all intertwined with public safety. You can't separate them and you can't solve them by pushing one step forward with an unwanted Alberta sheriff's police service.

Safety is about security and stability, knowing that you can afford rent, access health care, and send your kids to school without worry, knowing that you can ask for help and there will be someone there or somewhere safe to go, someone trained to listen in a system that acts. Bill 4 could have been a chance to invest in that kind of safety, to expand Clare's law, stabilize shelter funding, to invest in prevention. Instead, it ties a vital tool for protecting women to a policing project that Albertans have been very clear that they don't want and they don't need.

If this government truly cared about protecting women, it would start by funding the programs that already work and not hide them behind this very costly experiment.

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

**Member Eremenko:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Before I get started, I just want to say thank you to the Member for Calgary-Edgemont, who has done such an absolutely incredible job in giving voice to the voiceless in her role as shadow critic to status of women and as an advocate for domestic violence shelters and for women. She has done an absolutely formidable job on a very challenging file. I can't add anything else to what she has offered in regard to Bill 4 and how it addresses Clare's law. I just really hope that everyone in these Chambers recognizes how incredibly important it is for all of us to stand up and echo what the Member for Calgary-Edgemont has said and to understand it in our bones. This is something that is beyond excusable, and I want to thank the member for her very powerful comments and her ongoing advocacy.

3:20

I am standing to speak to Bill 4, and really, of course, the two big components that I think are so important to talk about in regard to this piece, without a doubt, are the resounding feedback that this government has received – I don't know if it's been heard, but at least it's been received – that Albertans are not looking to eliminate the RCMP from our midst. They are not looking for an Alberta police force, yet this continues to be an ongoing incremental move as though we won't notice it. What is it? From the pot into the pan, I think, and before you realize it, the water is boiling. I think I've mixed up my analogies here, but you get what I'm saying. The frog – before we realize it, we are in a whole lot of hot water, Mr. Speaker, and they have slowly been turning the heat up and up and up. Again, it's a place that nobody has asked to be in.

Before I get to the thrust of my argument, though, on Bill 4, I do want to comment on the section that does amend the Corrections Act, which allows for kind of a smoother facilitation, a smoother conveyance of inmates from correctional facilities to other jurisdictions. It reminds me of the wildfire that took place up in Peace River in April of last year. My brother happened to be living up there around that time, and he was kind of giving me play-by-plays about what was happening there, the evacuation orders, the alerts. Very scary time, of course. Then he said: oh, and Janet – oh. Excuse me. He said: Member, you know, my neighbours and I are incredibly concerned and the municipality is incredibly concerned

about what happens to the correctional centre that is there in Peace River. The fire was kind of licking at the door, and there really was not a concrete plan for how inmates were going to be safely evacuated and where they would go.

I'm pleased that the government recognizes that this is an incredibly critical issue. Other provinces I think have had similar legislation and similar allowances for quite some time, so it's nice to see that Alberta is catching up on this particular front. But goodness knows. Given some of what we know are warming summers, what we know is a far greater risk and a far greater prevalence of wildfires across the province – we have 10 correctional and remand centres across the province – this is long, long overdue. I certainly hope that any associated policy and regulations will quickly follow suit so that we can make sure that the conditions are appropriate for transferring inmates and where they are in fact going to go, as far as the destination goes, for a short or a longer period of time.

It does, however, remind me of the immense demands that are going to be placed on a very similar service as a result of the Compassionate Intervention Act once that is actually implemented. The Compassionate Intervention Act, of course, is involuntary treatment for people who are struggling with addiction and has significant demands from a conveyance perspective. To be able to get somebody from High Level to a compassionate intervention facility in Edmonton and back, I would hope: those are going to be big demands on sheriffs and sheriff's time. So the proof will be in the pudding in regard to whether or not they are in fact going to be resourced appropriately for the tasks that they're going to be asked to do.

I'll finish the rest of my comments here in discussion on public safety. A couple of months ago, Mr. Speaker, I was very honoured to cohost a public safety round-table in my riding of Calgary-Currie, in the community of Sunalta. For those of you who don't know, Sunalta is a wonderful, beautiful, special little community right down in the heart of Calgary's downtown. It's just off the west end near the old Greyhound station if people are familiar with that. There's a C-Train stop there. Just an absolutely vibrant, unique, one-of-a-kind neighbourhood. I'm a little bit biased. I did live in Sunalta for many years, and that is where my office is located, on 10th Avenue S.W.

I see people really struggling on 10th Avenue. Oddly enough, I got together with a couple of law firms on 10th Avenue to talk about auto insurance, but the conversation eventually veered towards some of the challenges that we were seeing and experiencing every day. I said: well, you know, a big part of my job is making sure that constituents and businesses in my riding have an opportunity to share what they're experiencing, to share their concerns. Then, of course, it's my responsibility to bring those forward to these Chambers. That's exactly what I hope to do today.

What we did over a couple of months is organized a round-table, a bit of a town hall at the beautiful new Sunalta community hub. We had over 60 people show up. This is with very little advertising, just kind of word of mouth and handing off some flyers up and down 10th Avenue. Over 60 businesses and residents showed up to talk about public safety. Mr. Speaker, I was floored at the care and the consideration and the compassion for the folks who have nowhere else to go, some of whom are struggling with immense mental health and addiction issues, very significant and complex health concerns, and who are facing significant barriers to housing as a result of deep, deep poverty. I was expecting, to be frank, a great deal of compassion fatigue, but it was not on display in Sunalta that day.

Here are some of the pieces that people asked for: washroom facilities, basic public washrooms – when folks are unhoused and

there's nowhere else to go, well, you can imagine – support and funding and attention for the immense costs. My colleague from Edmonton-City Centre, who I know is dealing with a very similar set of challenges to what I am, talked about the immense personal and business costs to deal with ongoing issues of vandalism and property damage, trespassing, and constant garbage cleanup. They're looking for constructive, long-term solutions to address loitering, open fires, and encampments. I had no idea. You know, it is not uncommon for open fires to be happening in alleyways, under carports, oftentimes as a result of people just trying to stay warm or because of someone in crisis, a mental health crisis, Mr. Speaker.

People are tired of Band-Aid solutions. They are tired of revolving-door policing that picks a person up for a small bylaw infraction, perhaps an outstanding warrant, and then a day or two later the person has not received any additional support. They have received no additional care. They don't want Band-Aid solutions that don't address the root causes of the problem.

Businesses and residents were pretty well unanimous. Not entirely. There wasn't, you know, universal consensus on this, but the vast majority of folks spoke to the fact that they want to see long-term investments in mental health and addiction supports and a response to deal with public drug use that includes harm reduction, housing, better funding for early intervention, acute care for psychiatric needs, and long-term, affordable, permanent supportive housing. Police don't offer any of those things.

### 3:30

I want to note that another one of the attendants at the meeting that I was so grateful to have was a fantastic community resource officer and one of his sergeants from district 2. Shout-out to district 2 with CPS. They do incredible work, and they were very generous with their time and their consideration to hear the concerns of businesses and residents in attendance at the town hall.

They said that one of the biggest things that they want to see back into the city, in the downtown core and everywhere else, is a reinvestment in the CERT teams, the CERT teams that get back out into community, because this is not just a challenge of the downtown core though certainly there is a kind of concentration there that might not exist in other places. One just has to take the C-Train line down to Tuscany, and they'll meet many folks who are struggling with the same issues, the same challenges around trespassing and general vandalism that we're dealing with in the downtown core. So this is not just a downtown issue, and it is certainly not just a policing issue.

We hear about public safety and we hear from this government about a deep commitment to public safety for many, many months that has gotten us to this place here with Bill 4, and then just earlier today, during question period, we hear from a minister who should know better when it comes to assisted living and social services that this is a fake crisis. It is in the Blues. We will see it in *Hansard*, that the minister with one of the biggest budgets in this government claims that the issues around public safety, the need for housing, the social disorder, the public unrest downtown are a fake crisis.

I'd like for him to come to our next town hall that we have in Sunalta or in Bankview or in Tuscany or down in the Beltline or anywhere else and tell those businesses who have spent tens of thousands of dollars with no support from the provincial government that this is a fake crisis. Tell those families whose loved ones are lost; they are meaningfully lost downtown and they're just looking for a safe place to lay their head, which we all deserve. That is no fake crisis, Mr. Speaker.

I understand that the challenges and the solutions are going to vary across my city, across the city of Edmonton, and they vary across the province, too. What we have got to understand is that law

enforcement can't be the only tool that we use to address these public safety issues. An Alberta police force, where sheriffs are asked to do more with less with no consultation on the role that they play in this new police force that, again, the majority of Albertans have not asked for: we still are missing the mark when it comes to actually addressing the issues.

Come on down to Sunalta, talk with the businesses, hear what their ideas are for long-term solutions. They are looking for financial relief. They are looking for support to be able to stay where they're currently located and not have to leave the downtown core – this is their community, too – and talk to the people who simply have nowhere else to go. They have nowhere else to go. Talk to the CPS officers who very generously gave their time to connect with me and to my residents and constituents to talk about progressive, ultimately long-term and sustainable solutions.

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you.

Are there any others wishing to speak? I will recognize the Member for Edmonton-Decore.

**Mr. Haji:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to talk about why we are here and the reasons and the rationale on bringing Bill 4 to address public safety. The government has been slowly rolling out a framework for a provincial police force. This has been rejected by Albertans for so many reasons, one being it's not economical; two being it doesn't deal with the root causes of public safety. Similar to many others of this Assembly, particularly on this side of the House, we have spent the summertime going out and speaking with Albertans actively to hear on issues that are so important. Creating an Alberta police force didn't come up once at the doors that I knocked at, but what I will say is that people have brought up to my attention that public safety is something that we need to address.

We do agree on this side of the House that we need to deal with public safety issues, but Mr. Speaker, we have to deal with it in a way that addresses the problem, not in the way that it is explicitly seen, as we see now, from Bill 11 in fall 2024, Bill 49 in spring 2025, and as we debate on Bill 4 now. In all of this, what we are seeing are performative measures without addressing the root causes of the problem. That's where we have a difference, how to solve the public safety issue that we're hearing from our constituents. Creating an Alberta police force is not one of the recommendations that we hear from Albertans. What we are hearing is dealing with issues that lead to crime, dealing with issues that are key determinants that lead into criminal activities and jeopardize the public safety.

One good example, Mr. Speaker, is getting a good-quality education to prevent some of the causes that will lead into criminal activities, but what we are witnessing and we are seeing is education that is in a very, very difficult situation. Kids missed school for three weeks as teachers were on strike. Teachers and kids are going back to school with classrooms with higher complexity and overflowing classrooms. These are some of the causes that will lead to poor education outcomes and, as a consequence, will increase criminal activity and crimes and jeopardize public safety. That is where we need to invest instead of investing in creating new uniforms, new structures, and putting billions of money where it is not necessary. It doesn't deal with the root causes and it doesn't address the problem; hence, it doesn't reduce the criminal activities, rates of crimes, and doesn't improve public safety.

A combination of poor education with either homelessness or poor housing conditions creates neighbourhoods where you will see more criminal activities happening and crimes increasing and putting public safety in jeopardy. In my riding of Edmonton-Decore, Mr. Speaker, just two weeks before the strike happened,

one of the schools in my area: in the playground of that school a shooting happened. It wasn't the first time; it was the second time such an incident happened and was reported to my office.

3:40

I've reached out to the parent council chair, Mr. Speaker, and they have expressed frustrations of public safety in the area, but it's not coincident that the area has poor housing, overcrowded classrooms, and requires some sort of support for students who go to those schools. What I'm saying is that they need the support of an after school program. They need divergent program activities that, when kids are not in the classroom, will engage some other activities so that you address some of the causes that create crimes and public safety problems.

Prior to my election, Mr. Speaker, I did work with quite a number of organizations in this city that deal with issues of preventative services that address criminal activities among the youth. In my experience, if we don't address those activities, or those root causes, and we don't address some of the challenges or the cracks that these youth fall into, it will lead into a safety issue. That is not where you need to create a new Alberta police force structure, but what you need to do is to work with those grassroots organizations, work with communities, work with Neighbourhood Watch, and create an environment where safety is promoted and where kids are supported when they are not in classrooms.

Another thing, Mr. Speaker, that leads to criminal activities and creates problems of public safety is having unsupported mental health issues or lack of access to mental health services. As we know, there are a number of people who do not have extended coverage of services in terms of accessing therapy or other mental health support services, and those are some of the communities that are impacted the most.

What we want the government to do is to invest in those kinds of services so that communities that do not have access, families that do not have access to mental health services can get access. Whether it is cognitive issues of mental health issues or whether it is issues that are induced by drug use or abuse, those are some of the things where we need some early interventions and we need to invest. The return of such an investment, Mr. Speaker, is that we will achieve better outcomes not only on the health and the family side of the individuals and families that are being supported but overall on the outcomes that we achieve at a community and public level.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, is that homelessness and poor conditions of housing affordability are some of the causes that lead into criminal activities. That is where we need to again do some preventative services or interventions or programs that invest in those kinds of broad services and programs.

Again, the same in the neighbourhoods that are in Edmonton-Decore, where we have some poor conditions of housing, is where you would see more criminal activities, and then you need to improve the conditions of those areas, Mr. Speaker. It is because of poverty. It is because of low-income situations. It is not having access or coverage of mental health services that are not covered within the public purse. Those are the areas where we need to invest instead of putting more money into creating an Alberta police force.

Mr. Speaker, what we will need the government to do is to invest in housing. What we need the government to do is to work with grassroots community organizations. We want the government to invest in the education system. The combination of those would lead to better community well-being and outcomes that will reduce crimes. Those are the outcomes that we need to reduce homelessness. The question is: why do we have this bloated number of homelessness? It is because we are not investing in access to

social housing. We are not addressing issues of housing affordability. We're not addressing issues of people's wages, that are stagnated and not affordable to the life that they are supposed to. That is where we need to put resources. Address those root causes so that we can reduce crimes that happen within our communities.

Mr. Speaker, the government has reduced a number of those preventative services in terms of investing. The government has reduced funding for those grassroots organizations that actually create programs, whether it is basketball activities in after school programs, whether it is supporting kids' literacy and numeracy after school programs, whether it is providing the supports that are needed. If you have young people that go to schools that are overcrowded, that do not have the support that they need and then later on don't have the support that they were supposed to get, that is what leads to some of the problems that we continue seeing within areas that we represent.

These are some of the things that we're hearing from Albertans that we have engaged with during the summertime, whether it is at the doors or whether it is in town halls or whether it is at community events. In the absence of not investing in those programs, Mr. Speaker, we will see a flare-up of the symptoms of why people are going to criminal activity. The solution is not just to come up with a Band-Aid without addressing the root causes.

Some of the interprovincial transfers that the bill carries, Mr. Speaker—I have seen some families come to my constituency office that have some of those challenges that they face because their young adults are being arrested in a different province, and they want them closer to where they live. I'm asking if those can be transferred here so they can be closer to where their loved ones live.

Those are some of the debates, but that doesn't mean, Mr. Speaker—creating an Alberta police force is not a better condition where you can achieve that. You can achieve that within the existing legislative frameworks that we have in place. We can achieve that with the current structure that is in place. The creation of an Alberta police force that is kind of proposed in this bill is not something that will address those root causes. It doesn't solve the problems, and it doesn't solve the problems from the grassroots level. To address public safety and reduce crimes, we need to deal with the root causes.

Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you.

Are there any others wishing to speak? I will call on the Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

3:50

**Member Boparai:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak on Bill 4, the Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2).

At first glance this bill appears to be a technical update to Alberta's policing and public safety legislation, but in reality this is a continuation of this government's costly and unpopular push toward a provincial police force, an initiative that Albertans have repeatedly rejected. This bill is not about improving public safety but about entrenching a political project that lacks public support, transparency, and a clear financial plan. While Albertans are struggling with affordability, health care access, and rising costs, the UCP is choosing to spend hundreds of millions on a policing rebrand that no one has asked for. While they push forward with this expensive experiment, they have failed to act on real public safety threats, including the alarming rise in extortion targeting Alberta families and businesses. Communities have been pleading for action, and this government has been silent.

Let's look at some background on this bill. Bill 4 proposes amendments to several statutes to formalize the Alberta sheriffs police service as a stand-alone police force with powers equivalent to municipal police. It also includes changes to the Disclosure to Protect Against Domestic Violence (Clare's Law) Act and the Corrections Act. These amendments may seem administrative, but they carry significant implications for Alberta's policing landscape and the safety of vulnerable communities. The bill grants ASPS officers the same powers and protections as municipal police. It also reclassifies ASPS officers as police officers under the Police Act, removing them from union representation and placing them under a new association model. The Clare's law amendments aim to improve threat assessments and information sharing between law enforcement and support agencies. The Corrections Act changes allow Alberta to enter agreements with other jurisdictions for inmate transfers, aligning us with other provinces.

The reason why my colleagues and I oppose this bill, why the NDP stands firmly opposed to Bill 4 is because it represents a costly and unnecessary experiment in provincial policing. Let me outline the most serious concerns. It's a costly provincial police force without a mandate. The UCP continues to push forward with the Alberta sheriffs police service despite no detailed cost breakdown for the transition and no credible evidence that this change will improve safety. Independent reports estimate that the transition could cost over \$1.3 billion over six years, including \$366 million in operating and capital costs, \$1.2 billion in lost federal funding, and millions more in training, equipment, vehicles, and infrastructure. If this UCP government would like to gamble, they should gamble with their own money, not Alberta taxpayers' money, on these unproven experiments. This is money that could be better spent on front-line policing, mental health supports, addiction treatment, and crime prevention programs.

Albertans are asking for help with affordability—we all know we are in crisis; our health care is in crisis—community safety, not a rebranded police force that duplicates existing services, drains public resources, and no one wants in Alberta. No Albertans want that wastage of money.

It's the lack of consultation and transparency. Polling shows 76 per cent of Albertans in RCMP-served communities are satisfied with their policing; 71 per cent say they were not properly consulted, as is the track record of this UCP government; 81 per cent believe there are more important priorities than changing police services.

Municipal leaders, Indigenous communities, and rural Albertans have all expressed concern about the lack of meaningful consultation. The UCP's sham town hall polls are not a substitute for real engagement, especially given that they only listen to those who agree with them; otherwise, they turn the mics off.

Rural Municipalities of Alberta have repeatedly criticized the government's lack of transparency and failure to engage municipalities in meaningful dialogue. Even the oversight board for the new service was created without public input. This is not how responsible governance works. Albertans deserve to be heard, especially on matters as critical as public safety.

Clare's law improvements are tied to unpopular legislation. We support improvements to Clare's law, especially those that enhance threat assessments and information sharing to prevent domestic violence, but tying these changes to the provincial police force rollout is poor governance. If the UCP were serious about protecting vulnerable Albertans, they would introduce Clare's law amendments as a stand-alone bill, not bury them in a controversial policing package. This tactic undermines the credibility of the Clare's law reforms and politicizes a vital issue that should be above partisan gain.

The last one is inaction on extortion and real public safety threats. Mr. Speaker, while the government is busy rebranding sheriffs and restructuring police legislation, they have failed to act on the growing extortion crisis affecting Alberta's families and businesses. I have met lots of families across Alberta in Calgary, Edmonton, Red Deer, other cities. People are living in fear. People are ready to leave the province. Families are living in rental units away from their kids, and this government is not taking it seriously. There are gun shootings every week, burning houses, extortion calls, but this government is unwilling to listen to them.

We have heard from communities across the province, especially in Calgary and Edmonton, about organized criminal networks targeting small businesses, immigrant families, and vulnerable individuals. These threats are real. They are urgent, and they are being ignored. There is no mention of extortion in this bill, no new tools for law enforcement, no support for victims, no strategy to address the rise in intimidation, threats, and violence.

Albertans are asking: why is the government focused on building a new police force when they won't even use the one they have to tackle extortion? This silence is unacceptable. Public safety means protecting people from real harm, not just creating new uniforms and logos.

What impact will this have on Albertans? Bill 4 will have far-reaching consequences for communities across Alberta. This bill will increase costs and reduce services. The transition to a provincial police force will divert funding from essential services, destabilize rural policing, especially in RCMP-served areas, create duplication and confusion in law enforcement roles. Albertans deserve better than a government that prioritizes political vanity projects over real safety solutions.

4:00

The RCMP currently serves over 1.5 million Albertans across 113 detachments. Their response times are among the best in the country, and their recruitment numbers are strong. Replacing the system with an untested alternative is reckless and unnecessary.

This bill undermines trust and oversight. The bill restructures labour relations for ASPs officers, removing union protections and placing discipline outside collective bargaining. This raises concerns about operational independence, oversight and accountability, transparency in police conduct. Without robust civilian oversight, Albertans cannot be confident that this new force will serve their communities fairly and effectively.

This bill misses the opportunity to strengthen domestic violence protections. While the Clare's law amendments are a step forward, they are overshadowed by the broader controversy. Victims of domestic violence deserve clear, focused legislation, not political games.

The Corrections Act amendments are sensible but overshadowed. The Corrections Act amendments allow Alberta to enter agreements with other jurisdictions for inmate transfers. This aligns us with most other provinces and improves flexibility in managing correctional populations. These changes are reasonable and necessary, but again, they are buried in a bill that is more about politics than public safety.

In closing, Bill 4 is not a public safety bill but a political manoeuvre to advance a provincial police force that Albertans have consistently rejected time and time again. It ties necessary reforms to unpopular changes, lacks transparency, and diverts resources from the real priorities facing our province. While the government pushes this bill forward, they continue to ignore the extortion crisis that is threatening Alberta's families and businesses. That is not leadership; that is neglect.

The Alberta NDP stands opposed to this bill. We call on the government to listen to Albertans, invest in real public safety

solutions, take action on extortion and organized crime, stop this costly and unnecessary policing experiment. Let's focus on what matters – affordability, health care, mental health, and community safety – not pet projects and distractions. Albertans deserve a government that puts their needs first.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker:** Are there any others? I will recognize the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

**Mr. Wright:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour to rise and speak to Bill 4. This is something that's been very important to a number of my constituents, specifically rural constituents. Now, I'm going to be rising to support this bill, Bill 4, the Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2). I'm not surprised that the UPP across the aisle – maybe I should respecify: the Urban Privilege Party – doesn't feel that this is important. My constituents do.

Now, let me give you some breakdowns from one of my municipalities. They sent an official letter on the municipality letterhead detailing out situations where the RCMP have failed to deliver the minimum expectations of their contract. April 8: no officer to assist with a legal notice. April 17: no officer available to support a fire inspection and fire situation. July 2: no officer to assist with legal notice. July 8: we'll get to that one in a little bit here when I come back. August 27: county peace officer reported a DUI on the road; no RCMP in response. This individual ended up crossing over into Saskatchewan, where they also tried to contact the detachment there, and no officer available.

Let's go back to that date here, Mr. Speaker, of July 8. Residents call in a suspicious driver and suspicious vehicle. What was the RCMP's response time? Thirty-six hours. I'll say that again: 36 hours. When they finally got on the road and decided that they were going to investigate this situation, what did they find? Did they find nothing? No. They found that vehicle on the side of the road, and they found a dead body beside it. These are the types of situations that are happening in rural Alberta where the RCMP are frankly not responding.

In fact, I had the opportunity to meet with the deputy commissioner just yesterday to raise a number of these concerns. Do you know what the answer was? "I'm sorry. You shouldn't be having these situations." Not an action plan, not a real, meaningful way to address this. In fact, in this meeting they raised a number of concerns across the province and how they and their officers were handling calls to rural Alberta. Now, my municipality pays \$1.2 million for policing and they get one officer. That is unacceptable, to have these breakdowns.

Mr. Speaker, more and more what we're finding across the province is the shell game. What do I mean by the shell game? Well, I had one of the leaders of the municipality reach out to me and tell me that once we brought forward their concern and it was raised with the RCMP, they were contacted to say: don't worry; officers are being redeployed to the area. Now, "redeploy" tells me that they pulled them out of servicing my community.

The folks across the aisle talk about it as being a waste of time. My community is very much asking to have continued augmentation and support of services being able to be provided so that we're not finding dead bodies on the side of the road, we're not having DUIs potentially killing somebody on a highway because there are no officers that are able to respond. Again, the response we get from the deputy commissioner: "I'm sorry. We'll do better. We'll redeploy folks to your area."

Mr. Speaker, as we continue to go through on this, for too long we've seen expectations of policing and corrections and emergency

responses across the provinces. Well, the champagne socialists and the mindless Marxists across the way say that this isn't an issue, this isn't what people are asking for, but they absolutely are.

**Member Irwin:** Point of order.

**The Acting Speaker:** A point of order has been called.  
The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

#### **Point of Order Language Creating Disorder**

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Using such disparaging remarks as "mindless Marxist" is clearly disparaging the members on our side of the House under 23(h), (i), and (j), and I ask that member to withdraw that comment and apologize.

**Mr. Williams:** Mr. Speaker, Marxism is a political ideology. That is a legitimate subject of debate. That's exactly what this is. Whether or not it is Marxism and whether or not it is mindless is a question for the matter of debate. It was not specified to individuals but broadly the other side. This is how debate works. There can be unsavoury things that different sides don't enjoy. However, the substance of the debate is important, and that's what the member was speaking to.

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you.  
Any others?

I do not find this to be a point of order. This is a matter of debate. It's subjective, and I will ask the member to continue with his words.

#### **Debate Continued**

**Mr. Wright:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Member Miyashiro:** Fascist.

**Mr. Wright:** My residents do . . .

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

**The Acting Speaker:** A point of order.

#### **Point of Order Language Creating Disorder**

**Mr. Williams:** Mr. Speaker, I find it absolutely terrifying that we have the childish response from members of the other side escalating. We heard the Member for Lethbridge-West make a very audible accusation towards that individual member. It was not pluralized, and he shouted the word "fascist." This has been ruled out of order multiple times. It was directed at an individual and is highly unbecoming. We make substantive debate in this House. The Speaker made his ruling. I would hope that that was settled, as it often happens. I sincerely ask the member opposite to withdraw and apologize.

4:10

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you.

**Member Miyashiro:** I apologize, Mr. Speaker, and withdraw.

**The Acting Speaker:** Okay. Thank you for that apology.  
The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat can continue.

#### **Debate Continued**

**Mr. Wright:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My residents do not have the luxury or the privilege of urban response times from law enforcement. In fact, in this Chamber I've tabled a number of documents from a town hall that was held by residents of the Desert Blume community where they met with the RCMP and the responses that they got were that they should invest in security systems, maybe consider a gated community. Better yet: how about you invest in private security that will roll around the streets of the community? Very disconcerting and disheartening for my residents. Again, I've tabled this in this Chamber already.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation is practical, responsible, and forward looking for the residents that are experiencing this type of gap in coverage from the RCMP. It's building on progress our government has already made for strengthening public safety and improving co-ordination across agencies.

Allow me to outline what Bill 4 accomplishes and why I believe no reasonable person could disagree with this after hearing the coverage gaps that we're receiving in my community. In Bill 4 under the government's leadership we have expanded the safer communities neighbourhood unit, strengthened electronic monitoring of offenders, and modernized how we manage correctional facilities. Bill 4 continues that work by updating the Corrections Act to reflect the realities of modern corrections management and provide the flexibility needed to keep both staff and public safe. It formally aligns the Alberta sheriff police services under the provincial officers collective bargaining act. This ensures that sheriffs have the same fair and consistent labour framework as other police officers across the province. By doing so, we avoid disruptions to essential services, we provide clarity for officers, and we recognize their critical role in keeping communities safe.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, on this side of the aisle, Madam Speaker, we believe in funding the police appropriately whereas the left continues to use the terms and policies to defund the police. These changes allow us to deploy police officer resources more efficiently while reinforcing our government's commitment that we will make Alberta's streets safer and making it our top priority.

Madam Speaker, in closing, Bill 4 is about preparedness. It's about responsibility, and most of all, it's about addressing the issues in policing that my constituents are bringing forward. It tells every Albertan that our government is serious about protecting them, that we value those who serve, and that we are ready to meet the challenges of tomorrow with strength and unity. I urge all members of this Assembly to support Bill 4, to join me in sending a clear message to Albertans that their safety matters, their rights matter when it comes to protecting their means of livelihood, as well as their government is delivering the results on safety.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

**Member Kayande:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in debate on Bill 4, the Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2). It seems we've already debated a bill on public safety and emergency services statute amendments this year. The bills keep coming; public safety is not improving. My constituents are noticing. I, like many in this House, knock on doors, talk to my constituents, and try to get an idea of how they feel, and they have consistently told me that public safety is one of their most important issues.

I live in an inner city riding, like my colleague the Member for Calgary-Currie. By the way, before I go any further, I would very much like to acknowledge the comments by the Member for Calgary-Falconridge around the unique public safety challenges faced in certain ethnic communities and in businesses in those communities with extortion by now a known and identified terrorist organization. The reason I bring this up is because Albertans are interested in solutions that actually solve their problems, Madam Speaker.

They're not interested in performance. They're not interested in virtue signalling. At best suppose this is the best idea ever. Suppose that bringing in an Alberta police force is actually going to miraculously solve the problems of recruitment and retention in police services that are being faced by departments all across Canada. Let's say that just magically simply rebranding, getting new uniforms, brand new equipment is going to solve the whole problem. It won't matter for at least three, four, five years because all of these things take time, and what Albertans are looking for are solutions to their public safety challenges today.

Now, I have heard over the many, many bills that we have had debating changes and bringing in slowly, incrementally, bit by bit the incredibly unpopular Alberta police force many comments about the crisis in rural crime. That crisis is real and it's absolutely heartbreaking. The stories that I have been hearing from across the aisle are heartbreaking. Nobody should have to live in fear. And then suddenly it's like: because you don't support this cockamamie notion, that means you don't care about rural crime; you don't care about people in Alberta. That is an insinuation that is exceedingly insulting. I'm elected by my constituents, and my job – I take it seriously – is to make life better for every single Albertan. And because I just simply ask a question – how is this going to help? – I'm accused of being a Marxist. Can you imagine? I have an MBA from Carnegie Mellon, the Tepper School of Business.

**An Hon. Member:** Whoa.

**Member Kayande:** Yeah. David Tepper owns a football team, has got his name on the building.

When the twin towers came down, I saw that from a lecture hall in my school, and of all the reasons I was crying, one of the reasons I cried was because I wanted to work in that building. I've spent my life in the centre of world capitalism in New York, and I get accused of being a Marxist simply because I ask the question: how is this going to help the people of rural Alberta?

They don't want this; 80 per cent of Albertans don't want this. Eighty per cent of Albertans don't think this will help. Eighty per cent of Albertans are exceedingly skeptical. That means not only is it my constituents who are skeptical but that a lot of the constituents of the people across the aisle are skeptical. I don't know how much they enjoy being insulted for simply being skeptical of what is actually a very bad idea. If you think that democracy matters, if you think that the voice of the people matters, then the issue that this government has with insulting us is actually the insult of their own constituents who are actually asking those very questions.

Let's talk about this a little bit. The public safety minister at one point during some bill debate around another Alberta police force bill said that people don't care about the uniform that the responding officer is wearing. You know, I had to think about that a little bit. I mean, I grew up in St. Albert and I grew up with the RCMP, and I liked that. I remember, actually, when a previous Conservative government was trying to annex St. Albert into Edmonton. Oh, gosh. I must have been six years old – I don't know – or seven. Like, I was young. The one thing I remember is: that means we've got to give up the RCMP; I don't know if I like that.

4:20

Policing depends – I mean, look, I'm not an expert on this. I just talked about how, like, I've done finance all my life. I'm not an expert on, you know, how to police and what makes a good police organization. But one thing that I do know is that when people have a good feeling about the police, when the police is representative of the community, it seems to make that police service a lot more effective. And the thing is that . . .

**Mr. Williams:** Will the member accept an intervention?

**Member Kayande:** No, thank you. Not at this time.

The thing is, you know, that brands are persistent, right? You can have, like, a brand that has existed for a very long time, is very storied, has a great deal of history behind it and has been completely trashed to complete garbage and represents nothing that it stands for anymore, yet people will still kind of have a good feeling about that brand. Let's take the conservative brand as an example.

Again, when I knock on doors, you know, many people answer the door. Of course, in Calgary-Elbow 46 per cent of people there who voted did not vote for me. I ask, "Well, why?" and they say, "Well, you know, I'm a conservative." Great. What does that mean? Is it conservative to take people's rights away? Is it conservative to blow \$600 million on no-bid contracts? Is it conservative to cancel green line infrastructure and sink the taxpayer with \$2 billion? Is it conservative to ban investment in energy? Is it conservative to make massive cockamamie social experiments in policing that are going to cost a billion dollars in lost federal money? Is that conservative? The answer is kind of like: well, no.

But conservatives are good on crime. Great. Have they been? Is your life better now than it was in 2019? Is your security situation better now than it was in 2019? It's a very simple question, but the people of Alberta know it's worse. It's a lot worse since 2019. It's a lot worse under this UCP government, and this police force is not the answer.

Let's talk about costs, \$1.4 billion over six years in costs alone. That's set-up costs. That's incremental operating expenses. There's \$1 billion over six years of federal money, and this government is just saying: "You know what, feds? Your money is no good to me." Let's talk about that a little bit because it is a massive contention of this government, those across the aisle, that Alberta has – what's the term that they use all the time, that we're being dealt with unfairly by the federation? It's true; I want a better deal just as much as everyone else does. What about that billion dollars that you're leaving on the table? When I talk to my constituents about this, they often ask me, "So what would you do different?" and I'm like: "You know what? If the federal government is offering me \$100 million for, say, a federal dentistry program just to co-ordinate benefits, I'm going to take the money."

If the federal government is offering us \$170 million for policing, why are we throwing that money back in their face? It seems to me that one of the ways that we could get a better deal from the federal government is just: when they offer money, maybe we take it. Maybe let's try that. But no. Simply because of ideological purity, because we must signal that, oh, we are doing something about rural crime, because we must signal we must blow \$2 billion of the taxpayer's money on this. It's actually more than \$2 billion, but I'm going to round down.

The reason I'm rounding down is because the hon. Minister of Finance has maintained many times that we can't give the teachers the certainty and the deals they want because it would cost us \$2 billion. Every single kid who's in a crowded classroom is in that crowded classroom because this government wants its own police force as a vanity project. That's not okay. That's not okay to my

constituents, and I don't think that that's okay for the rest of the people of Alberta either.

Now, I take very seriously the comments that the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat recently said where he brought his questions to the deputy commissioner. I'm interested because the response, which I paraphrase as "I'm sorry; we'll do better" – God, what I wouldn't give to hear that from this government on anything. Affordability is a crisis, public safety is a crisis, classrooms are in crisis, the health care system is in crisis, and not once has this government said: I'm sorry; I'll do better. What I wouldn't give for that.

If past is prologue, if future behaviour can best be modelled on past behaviour – and therapists tell me that's how it works. If that's actually how it works, I bet that when the Alberta police force is in operation and rural crime is still in crisis, nothing will have changed except that the "I'm sorry" goes away. This government is good at making things get worse.

I really wish, you know, that there was some semblance of good faith from the other side on this debate, Madam Speaker.

**Mr. Williams:** Will the hon. member accept an intervention?

**Member Kayande:** No, thank you.

I very much wish that instead of throwing about extremely inaccurate assessments of my perceived motivations, this government would simply admit that, yes, rural crime is a huge problem. This rural crime problem has gotten a lot worse since 2019. The government has had seven years to solve this rural crime problem and has done nothing on it while it has gotten worse and now is blaming the RCMP, one of the most storied police forces in the world, for their problems. Fine. They have a right to do that, but instead I wish that they would simply say: "You know what? There's a point here. I can care about rural crime, and, boy, I do. I believe everybody in this province should be safe." I could care about that and still think this is a terrible, money-wasting, useless idea that won't solve anyone's problems.

My question, I guess, for members on the other side is: why are you going along with this?

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

**Mr. Williams:** Thank you, Madam Speaker, for that encouraging debate. However, I think we are going to adjourn debate on this for now and return to it soon.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

## Bill 7 Water Amendment Act, 2025

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

**Ms Schulz:** Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to rise this afternoon to move second reading of Bill 7, the Water Amendment Act.

If passed, this act will modernize Alberta's water management system and make more water available for growing communities, farmers, ranchers, and businesses. Cities and towns across the province are adding new residents, and of course we know our economy is growing as well. The population has almost doubled over time; however, the Water Act hasn't meaningfully been updated in 25 years. We need a water management system that meets the challenges of today.

4:30

Two years ago Albertans – agriculture producers, industry, irrigators, municipalities, and First Nations communities – had concerns about drought. As Albertans do, they all came together, rolled up their sleeves for passionate and productive conversations about how we could come together to ensure that all water users had access to water during a very uncertain time. Those discussions made it very clear that changes need to be made and that we should take the opportunity to build on that momentum, use the experience, feedback, knowledge, and ideas that we were hearing and update our water management system and the Water Act.

We've continued the engagement since then. We heard, Madam Speaker, from rural and urban water users, industry, Indigenous communities, farmers, ranchers, environmental groups, business leaders, and people who are just passionate about water. They gave us clear feedback on what's working, what should change, and that's why there will not be broad reductions or clawbacks in allocations for existing licences. Our water licence priority system, based on the principles of first in time and first in right, will remain. This was not the time for additional chaos. We had to be thoughtful about the changes we were making. Royalties, bulk, or volumetric pricing of water are not included in this legislation.

We also heard strong support for maintaining water for life and the approach to managing water that has supported communities, the economy, the environment, and traditional water uses for 120 years here in Alberta. But through two rounds of engagement we did hear a lot of practical ways to make our system stronger. These ideas, Madam Speaker, direct from water users across our province, helped shape the bill that is before us today in the Legislature. These are their ideas about ways to strengthen the water management system not only for today but for years to come. For example, many pointed out a few things that are slow, confusing, lack transparency, or simply just don't make sense anymore under the current context. This bill, if passed, will cut through the confusion and help improve transparency and streamline regulatory decision-making when it comes to water.

We also heard that there needs to be clarity about the use of alternative water sources like rainwater, stormwater, and how there still is a lack of information on where and when water is being used across our province. The amendments that we see here today will fix that. The proposed changes will broaden the definitions and allow the use of alternative sources of water, which could help increase water reuse for municipalities and for industry, reducing the amount of fresh water, then, that is needed.

Finally, we also heard that the regulatory and legislative process to secure interbasin transfers is out of line with other jurisdictions in Canada. Sometimes it discourages water users from choosing the least impactful water source. That's why we're bringing this forward in this bill today as well.

These amendments will support Albertans and our industries and their responsible use of water while conserving this vital resource.

Today I'm going to walk through some practical examples to help identify how these changes are working to address the challenges that we've heard and how they will make our system stronger into the future. First are the changes that look at making the system more flexible and make it easier to amend licences for minor updates in a timely way. For example, right now a farmer cannot easily expand or adjust where a water allocation is used on their property. If a farmer has a licence but wants to move the water intake or irrigation pivot on their own land, they can't just go and do it. They need to formally apply for a new licence transfer. Madam Speaker, even though we've reduced Water Act approvals by 79 per cent since 2021, it still takes time, paperwork, and some

waiting, that prevents water from being used to grow crops. This bill will make it easier to amend licences for these kinds of minor changes, provided there's no impact to the environment or other users.

Another example. Right now a farmer in southern Alberta, who holds multiple licences, and many do, can't consolidate them for the same project without losing their seniority. Under current rules amalgamating those licences automatically shifts them to a junior priority licence. This actively discourages users from using their water allocation as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Another piece to address goes back to the 1990s, Madam Speaker, where a one-time window was open to allow agricultural users doing stock watering on public land to register their water under the Water Act. This window closed before many of the users had a chance to register. Bill 7 will allow us to open up another window so that traditional agricultural users on public land can register their legacy water use, which will allow us to manage those in a more fair and consistent way.

Now, when it comes to interbasin transfer – and I know this was one of the main topics of discussion over the past two years; this goes back to the very first town hall we did when we were addressing the drought situation two years ago – we are creating a new class of lower risk interbasin transfer that can be approved by the minister and would not require a special act of the Legislature. This change would bring Alberta in line with other jurisdictions in Canada, and it just makes sense.

Now, most of the examples that were raised to us in terms of why this was a change that was very necessary came from municipalities. A couple of examples here, Madam Speaker. For years Milk River has faced significant water shortages. The town is in a closed basin, which is small, and actively searching for a more reliable long-term water supply. If the town secures water from a neighbouring basin next summer, or at a time when the Legislature is not sitting, we should not have to wait for the Legislature to convene before this request is reviewed and approved. Bill 7 will let the minister, supported by the department, review these applications in a timely way. This matters especially for communities struggling with water shortages or with things that might happen outside of their own control, like what we are seeing in Milk River with the siphon south of the border.

Similarly, the county of Wetaskiwin and Reeve Bishop joined our announcement to provide some examples of how this would help some municipalities. County borders often cross basin lines. Whether it's a county or a regional water system, if they want to expand that line, they could be prevented from crossing an arbitrary line, preventing water from getting to where it's needed or expanding those systems. If they were able to secure small amounts of water, for example, from the Red Deer River basin, it shouldn't take the entire Legislature to review this very low-risk application. A review by the minister while still assessing criteria like flow rates, invasive species, and impacts on users downstream would protect the environment and help them access the water that is available.

This change could also reduce the amount of freshwater used by our industries. We've seen an example where, potentially, effluent from a pulp mill could be moved a short distance in a neighbouring basin for industry to use for things like fracking. That would mean fewer intakes and that each operator doesn't need to source, store, and manage freshwater on-site. It could mean fewer straws in the river and benefit communities downstream, Madam Speaker. This could reduce freshwater use while keeping environmental protections in place.

To be clear, every interbasin transfer must still be reviewed and approved. Any high-risk transfers, of course, would still have to come to members of this Legislature for that special act of the

Legislature. The definitions and amounts classified as low risk are included in the bill. They're based on data, flow rates for each basin, and the bill also limits transfers to adjacent basins. That was firmly based on the feedback we received throughout engagement over the last year and a half.

We're also proposing that the Peace, Slave, and Athabasca River basins in northern Alberta be combined into one basin. This is purely for management purposes so that we can more effectively manage water in the area and better align with how other river basins are managed. Those rivers converge to form the Slave River, which flows as a single watershed into the Mackenzie River system in the Northwest Territories. This change will make it easier for water users in the area to access the water they need efficiently and effectively.

Now, Madam Speaker, we also have amendments in this bill to encourage water conservation and support healthy aquatic ecosystems. For example, this bill will let us better define "return flow" and "water for reuse" and amend licences to account for return flows. This will make it easier for a municipality to reuse more of its waste water instead of automatically returning it to the river, hoping that the community meets its needs while leaving more freshwater available for users downstream. This is one of the main asks for municipalities who are looking to reuse waste water and stormwater for water conservation purposes.

Of course, we need to protect aquatic ecosystems, and those parameters and guardrails will be developed in regulation. A good example could be, Madam Speaker, a greenhouse operation that may want to use water that it has collected from the roof of their greenhouse to water plants. The proposed amendments will allow for future policy to be defined so that rainwater can be collected in this way without a water licence.

Another example could be mid-sized growing communities who are seeing increased demand for water. I know this is something, Madam Speaker, that you know a lot about first-hand. A number of communities have suggested that there are ways to better capture and account for reusing stormwater and municipal waste water instead of letting it go unused. This shows the potential that can be unlocked by expanding how stormwater and other alternative water sources are used, and enable our system – and I think develop some good practices around water conservation in communities across our province.

Through these changes we are also ensuring what we know about how much water has been allocated, how much water is being used, and what purposes it is being used for. It's necessary for us to have this information on the current water supply in our province. It's also helpful, of course, in times of significant drought, like what we saw two years ago, or in times of water shortages. So we're proposing disclosure requirements for licence transfer and assignment agreements.

**4:40**

This enabling legislation will allow us to go and engage with Albertans on how this information should be disclosed and released in the future. Engagement would follow Bill 7 passing, so that we can work with water users to determine how and what's collected; if appropriate, how and when we would release that information in the future.

Finally, Madam Speaker, this bill will give the government the authority to set consistent expectations for measurement and reporting for all licences so that water use data is reported fairly and transparently across the province. During drought or water shortages reliable information on water use won't just help us as a government, but it helps all water users to better track and understand what's happening in the system, water availability

conditions, so that we can be effective in our response. I think it also helps to provide certainty for industries who are looking to grow and set up in Alberta to have an understanding of where water is available for that to happen.

To be clear, Madam Speaker, our environmental standards and protections will remain as strong as ever under this act.

In closing, I do just want to thank the thousands of Albertans who took part in this engagement. We, of course, had an online component. We travelled the province. We wanted to hear from people. I know people are very passionate about water, as it is one of our most precious resources, and I am grateful for all of the Albertans right across our province who took time to share their ideas, feedback, questions, and concerns so that we could really, truly get this right.

I also want to thank our Water Advisory Committee. The committee was set up, Madam Speaker, in a time of water shortage and risk of drought, but the conversations that we were having at that time were so important. We didn't want to lose that knowledge, perspective, and momentum, and we were able to extend the time of their work so that we could use their expertise in really shaping the direction that this legislation was going in.

First and foremost, I want to thank the MLA for Cypress-Medicine Hat, who did an exceptional job of... [interjection] Absolutely. Thank you very much to the MLA for Cypress-Medicine Hat for chairing that committee. It was a lot of time, effort, again, passionate discussions. I wouldn't say heated; I would say very constructive, but he did a really excellent job, and I think, coming from southern Alberta, knows first-hand just how important it was for us to get this legislation right and strike that right balance in allowing flexibility and maintaining our high environmental standards.

On that committee we also had Paul McLaughlin, reeve of Ponoka county, former president of the Rural Municipalities of Alberta. We had Ian Anderson, former CEO of Trans Mountain; Alex Ostrop, former chair of the Alberta Irrigation Districts Association; Jack Royal, CEO of the Blackfoot Confederacy Tribal Council; Tanya Thorn, mayor of Okotoks and director of towns south on the board of Alberta Municipalities. We had Kim Sturgess as an observer, who is with WaterSMART and also provided some guidance as well.

Madam Speaker, I just want to say that I'm so grateful for the time and dedication of that group to take the feedback that we were hearing, the data that we had, and provide some good, constructive feedback on where this legislation was headed. With that, I do hope that all members of the House support this important work and the legislation that we have in front of us today.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there members that wish to join the debate? The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

**Dr. Elmeligi:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I really, truly want to start by expressing gratitude to the minister for bringing water to the Legislature floor. It is the most important thing. Water is life, as we all know, and I am truly grateful for the minister's work to bring this bill to the Legislature. It's just nice to talk about water, really. It is a really long time since the Water Act has been updated, so there's a real opportunity here.

Water is a significant issue for all of our communities, and industries care about this. It's the foundation, obviously, of the water that I'm drinking today in the House, but it's also a foundation of economic growth and economic success for many industries across the province. Water drives industry success. It is an essential part of our economy. It's important for people and

communities. It's also needed for wildlife and habitat, and a ton of ecological goods and services that come with that.

In engaging in the creation of this bill, I also want to acknowledge and thank the minister for the truly robust public consultation process that happened here. It was impressive to watch, and there were a lot of Albertans involved who had an opportunity to participate and share their views. There are two things in particular that I want to acknowledge. The first one is that the minister displayed flexibility in addressing people's concerns as they were going through the consultation. Not every minister in this House has done that, Madam Speaker, and that is commendable. Thank you to the minister for doing that. She adjusted timelines when people asked for more time, and the majority of amendments that were consulted on are reflected in this bill. That is also something that's super great, and there's more consultation coming as they develop the regulations. You know, I think one of the things that's hard about water is that there's, like, the legislation, there's the policy, there are the regulations. I don't think that people always understand which belongs where, so I'm excited about the consultation on the regulations also.

There are good parts about this bill, Madam Speaker, but of course I have areas of concern. I'm sure that's not going to come as a surprise to anybody. I want to first start by talking about the merging of the Peace, Slave, and Athabasca River basins into the Peace-Athabasca-Slave River Basin. This is a significant change to water planning and management in the province.

Alberta is a signatory of the Mackenzie River master agreement with the Northwest Territories, B.C., Saskatchewan, Yukon, and Canada. In that master agreement no one jurisdiction can act unilaterally to make significant changes. There are legal obligations to honour its commitments to manage the entire Mackenzie basin, not just the main stem and the subbasins that are in Alberta. That agreement requires that each jurisdiction give prior notice of doing anything that will impact another.

Merging these basins has the potential to do that, Madam Speaker, so we need to make sure that those other jurisdictions have been notified and that they've been given sufficient time to respond to this change. I did talk with some people in the Northwest Territories in government who didn't know if that consultation had happened. I guess what I'm asking the minister for is perhaps in Committee of the Whole, when we get more into the debate, maybe she can share when and where those conversations happened and what the outcome of those conversations were.

The original separation of basins is based on broad principles of watershed management. I'm also wanting to better understand why this is a clause in this bill and what the justification and the background is for that, particularly since we also have this idea of the low-risk interbasin transfers. If we amalgamate these two basins, then something that would have previously been an interbasin transfer no longer becomes one, and then it's not limited or managed in the same way. I think the implications of combining these two basins into one are significant, and I look forward to the minister explaining why and what is driving that decision and what data supports that amalgamation. It's my understanding that data feeds into the definition of how these water basins are mapped, how we draw the lines on the map. What data is supporting bringing them together? I guess that is my bigger question there. I do think that this idea of merging these basins together requires a bit more consultation with parties outside and inside of Alberta. Yeah. I think that we need more conversation there.

The interbasin transfers, I think, are a big part of this bill and are probably the most controversial part. I will say that when you say the words "interbasin transfer," there are people who instantly get kind of anxious, right? Like, those words can mean a lot to a lot of

people, and people automatically start thinking about the risks of invasive species and implications for how water is moved around the landscape and shared. What if there's drought over here and not over here? I do appreciate the criteria in the bill that defines a low-risk transfer and committing to what is called low-risk transfers. I think that could be strengthened, and I'll get into that in a little bit right here.

4:50

Currently interbasin transfers are permitted, as the minister said, through a special act in the Legislature. There have only been seven approved so far and that's because it is a little bit harder to do, right? It has to be a special act in the Legislature, which means that it has to be debated and there's a robust public review and opportunity for really anybody to review and share their views through us as elected officials.

I feel like there's got to be some kind of middle ground here, Madam Speaker, right? Like, I agree with the minister. In times of drought, later in the summer when things are the driest, we might not be in the Legislature to have this debate about a low-risk interbasin transfer. I can appreciate that timeline, but also I do want to make sure that we are being very thoughtful and considerate about interbasin transfers and whether or not one is required when it is being asked for. I think we do our due diligence to serve current and future generations when we really take the time to consider the potential implications of interbasin transfers.

The criteria in the bill are great, but they're not comprehensive. In particular, Madam Speaker, I'd love to see more conversation around the pre and the post pieces of an interbasin transfer. Like, what happens before a company or a proponent comes forward with the idea of an interbasin transfer? What work have they done to show that this is the last resort, this is the only option that will actually work for them. As one stakeholder told me: if you're talking about an interbasin transfer, you've already screwed up somewhere. You've already used too much water in your basin, and you've already, you know, kind of not thought through the actual realities of how much water is available. I mean, that may or may not be true, but I think there is a need to have some justification before to demonstrate that this is required.

And then I'd love to see some criteria about the post piece. Once an interbasin transfer is permitted, what are the monitoring requirements? How do we know that it will be okay? Is there regular monitoring? What are the thresholds and criteria? The thresholds and criteria don't have to be defined in the legislation – I guess that could be regulations – but what happens if those thresholds and criteria are violated? Will we be able to withdraw that interbasin transfer in the event that it doesn't work the way that, you know, we thought it would in the first place?

So to address these risks, I'm also concerned with a couple of clauses in this interbasin transfer. Section 47(1)(b) talks about "the opinion of the Director" in regard to invasive species risk. That shouldn't be the opinion of the director; that should just be based on data. Is there a risk of introducing invasive species? What does the data say? I'm a little concerned about the word "opinion" there.

And then section 47(3) puts a lot of power in the minister's hands that, "The Minister may, by order, authorize the Director to issue a licence" for an interbasin transfer. This is a pattern that we've seen, Madam Speaker, with this current government centralizing a lot of power in the minister's office. This minister knows that I respect her and I respect her work, but eventually one day she won't be the minister sitting in that chair. Maybe she'll be sitting in another chair. I mean, that's not what I wish, but, you know, it probably is going to happen.

So what happens when a different minister is sitting in that chair, Madam Speaker? Any time we have legislation that authorizes a minister to make these decisions without public oversight or review, it just raises a flag of concern for me because we need to make sure that it's not just the minister who is making these decisions but that those decisions are informed by data or experts or people working in the public service or whatever. I always get worried when there is too much power in the minister's office because these decisions should be based on science and evidence.

The other challenge with these interbasin transfers, Madam Speaker, is that there's no opportunity for public review or appeal. I think that that's a really important part of this because people in the public are so concerned about interbasin transfers. We need to make sure that there's a mechanism to report to the public and ask them if they are okay with it, if the public also perceives this to be a low-risk interbasin transfer.

Cumulative thresholds are not set. Maybe that will come out of the regulations, that there's going to be a total amount of volume for interbasin transfers in a particular area. I really think that particularly, again, applies to the merging of those two basins up north. There's no maximum, then, because they'll just all be one basin. How are we going to account for that in this bill?

There are some good moves forward in this bill, like I said at the beginning. You know, there are things that I liked; for example, simplifying water licensing process to consolidate multiple allocations. This does serve an issue that irrigators have brought forward. It decreases administrative delays for them with the timelines, and it reduces red tape in the ag sector. That is great. Increasing efficiencies in this regard is a positive move forward.

Increased reporting and monitoring. Of course, I'm a fan. I ask the minister about increased monitoring and reporting all the time, so, yes, I do appreciate that. I do think that in the conversation with the regulations we'll need to be careful to talk about how we're going to support users to meet these requirements with either technology or training. Madam Speaker, there needs to be more jobs in the public service to enforce this and to support water licence holders to work through these new monitoring requirements, so I also look forward to seeing a whole bunch of jobs posted on the government website and Environment and Protected Areas to help implement this bill.

Users also need to know what their monitoring data is going to be used for. That was one of the common themes I heard from users. "If I'm collecting this monitoring data, where is it going? Will it be publicly available?" Spoiler alert: the answer to that should be, yes, but not with names. Privacy can still be maintained, obviously.

Then the other piece, I think, really came out of the conversations that I had with the WPACs: how will that data feed into the WPACs so that they can write their state of the basin reports? These WPACs are really committed groups of people who are understanding their local watershed in a really intimate way, and they rely on the government-gathered monitoring data to inform their state of the basin reports.

Then the other piece that I wish was reflected in this legislation is something that links those state of the basin reports to local decision-making. When we're talking about an interbasin transfer for a municipality, for example, is the state of the basin report from that local WPAC part of the decision-making, part of recognizing that that interbasin transfer is necessary for that municipality? I wish that was reflected here more.

I love the definition of water to include rainwater. Greenhouses obviously love that. Well, maybe not obviously, but they do. There's a huge benefit to the ag sector in that way as well. So the redefinition of rainwater is great. Including a more robust definition

of good standing and related to compliance with the conditions of the licence I also am a fan of.

There are a few things missing from this bill, Madam Speaker, that were part of the public consultations but aren't necessarily reflected, so I'm hoping that we can have a conversation around some of that as well. First of all, the environmental requirements. The minister and the deputy minister have told me that environment is a priority, and I believe that it is, but I think it needs to be reflected in these amendments more. For example, in section 54 a lot of these director-led amendments to licences should consider in-stream flows and water quality and impact to meeting water conservation objectives directly in the legislation. The state of the basin reports from the WPACs should be in the decision-making, and I think that those should be listed, too, as something the director will consider when looking at these amendments to licences.

In the water for reuse clauses, which is also a big – a good part of this bill is finding ways for us to reuse water, but we need to think about environmental impacts, water conservation objectives. Those should also be directly addressed in this bill.

There are requirements for sharing timelines for decisions and meeting timelines for decisions. I wish that there were also going to be timelines for the monitoring data and for the public sharing of that monitoring data. Yeah, that's all. I think we just need more jobs in the public service and more government monitoring. I like jobs, and I think there are a lot of really good people out there who are waiting to do this kind of water monitoring work. So I think that that's important.

5:00

Something that is also not reflected in the act, Madam Speaker, is any kind of emphasis on nature-based solutions. Wetlands will store water and slowly release it over the summer. They address flood and drought. I wish we had some focus anywhere in this act – it would be great – around nature-based solutions and how we can get wetlands to work for us as well as intact forest. When I was thinking about intact forest, I realized how this act actually ties to so many other acts. It relates to the Forests Act, the land-use framework, ALSA and stewardship and all of these things. If I start thinking about it, the list of acts is so long.

That doesn't necessarily have to be in the act, but I look forward to the minister describing how she sees this Water Amendment Act tying into these other pieces of legislation to make sure that we are considering the broader landscape. In particular, I'm curious about the All-season Resorts Act. That's a new piece of legislation. I know from going out on the eastern slopes this summer, Madam Speaker, there are rumours of all kinds of resorts popping up. I don't know where these rumours are coming from, but people are like, "Well, they want to put a lodge up here and this over here," and then the next question that I hear is: where's the water going to come from? How are we making sure that what we're doing in the Water Act and with these licences is going to relate to these all-season resorts?

The other piece that is not really in here but should be is protecting our headwaters in some way and addressing cumulative effects. Cumulative effects across Alberta, especially on the eastern slopes and in our headwaters, is an issue of increasing importance, and this comes down to a whole bunch of things. It comes down to public lands management. When I talk about protecting our headwaters, I'm not necessarily talking about protected areas like parks per se. I'm more talking about land-use planning and how we prioritize and shape land-use planning to make sure that our headwaters are protected and that the water continues to flow. If we impede flow and water quality from our headwaters, it just creates a whole array of issues downstream. So how is protection of our

headwaters reflected in this, and how does this bill help us address cumulative effects? I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that when I go out on the eastern slopes, the thing that I think about the most right now is that we are asking too much of this landscape. We're still asking the landscape to be everything to everybody all the time.

All of our pieces of legislation that are land based or water based should be considering these cumulative effects. First Nations are calling for clear, enforceable definitions of cumulative effects in law. I'm sure some of my colleagues – you can probably guess who they are – are going to be speaking to some of the First Nations issues and concerns with this bill.

Also, we need to consider the enforcement, Madam Speaker. Enforcement takes capacity, and I think that there's a double edge of carrot and stick here, right? It's like working with people to help them with this.

At the end of the day, I look forward to debating this bill. It's a great step forward, and I think we'll have some great discussion. Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there others that would like to join the debate on second reading of Bill 7? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

**Ms Sweet:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 7, the Water Amendment Act, 2025, a bill a long time in the making for sure. I think the minister and I have probably been talking about the importance of water since 2022, '21, when the big drought started and it started to become, "What are we going to do?" and recognizing at that point that a real conversation around water hadn't happened since the '90s, when the last major drought had hit the prairie provinces. I recognize that this has been years and years and years of work, and I thank the minister for taking on a piece of the job that no one wanted to tackle because talking about water is very complicated and it impacts every single thing that we do. So I appreciate that this has probably been a lot more work than was initially anticipated to be.

I also want to recognize the Water Advisory Committee as well. The people that were assigned to work on travelling the province and consulting with people, I think, were great choices and come with a lot of experience and connection to community and to our economy. I think that they were very diligent in the work that they did and were able to speak to a diverse group of people, so I do want to start from that piece.

I will have some questions as we go through the act in relation to implementation and how it will work once it is – or when and if it comes into act. I will not predispose the outcome of a vote. More around sort of the economic impacts and what this means as we look at how we're supporting our different communities, understanding that there are complexities around the history of our water acts.

For people that maybe don't know how complex this can be, the first water licence in Alberta was issued in 1894 by the federal government, who was responsible for managing the water and who managed it for and on behalf of Alberta until 1930, when Alberta took the transfer from the federal government and became the primary holder of all of our water licences. The first act in relation to water in Alberta was actually issued in 1931 as the Water Resources Act, and it established the provincial legislation that continued to exist until 1999. The act in itself was 38 years old when it was finally reviewed and consultation was done, and that was in response to the major drought that was happening at that time. In 1999 the Water Act was passed, and as we can see, another 30 years later almost, we are now doing it again.

[The Speaker in the chair]

It is not frequent or often to see the government take on a piece of legislation such as this within the history of our province because of the complexity that this conversation brings. I would say, and I think many Albertans would say, that from 1931 to 1999 the act was working just fine until we had to start responding to the climate shifts and the massive droughts. Then I would say that more often than not in talking to the irrigation networks that I was speaking to, the agricultural producers that I spoke to over the years, there weren't huge concerns around the act between 1999 and today except, again, for the fact that we had a responsibility to figure out how we were going to manage and address the major droughts that we saw over the last years.

The government stepped up, obviously, during the last recent drought that we had and were issuing special licences and trying to figure out ways to ensure that we were able to meet not only the municipal needs, so that people have water, but also to ensure the quality of care for our livestock producers, that they were able to manage the animal welfare pieces that needed to be addressed during those droughts, which is what created this conversation about: what do we do next?

There have been investments made, obviously, into the irrigation networks by both the federal and provincial government to ensure that if we are going to grow food for the world, we are doing that in a way that we are also trying to conserve as much water as we possibly can. Agriculture producers are live to this conversation. They are very aware of the fact that we have to balance our use of water while we expand our crop production. That investment in irrigation, that ability for water capture, that ability to upgrade pipes so that we're not losing water through faulty piping is a serious investment and a positive one.

I would say again, as the Minister of Infrastructure probably thinks as well and the minister of energy probably would consider, being able to upgrade our infrastructure networks and making sure that there are major investments into infrastructure projects to ensure that we're not losing water through evaporation and through pipeline leaking is also part of this conversation.

5:10

**An Hon. Member:** Hear, hear.

**Ms Sweet:** I knew you'd like that.

Again, as we look at the Water Act and the fact that, as my colleague from Banff-Kananaskis indicated, it is a bigger conversation, this act will intersect with a variety of other policies, pieces of legislation and also basically touches across all ministries. So it's important that all ministers are engaged in the conversation and are aware of what their colleagues are doing and how this act will then impact their ministries.

One of the things that continuously has come up in conversations that I've had with municipalities as well as with irrigation producers is how we are deciding and looking at our regional water plans. We see significant investment in the south. I think my colleague from Lethbridge would attest to this in Lethbridge county. The irrigation investments, the ability to look at how we're managing water in the south is a really live conversation because we recognize the economic opportunity that it brings. We have specialized crops. We have lots of value-add. We have lots of agrifood production happening in the south, so that investment and that intention has made sense.

**An Hon. Member:** Hear, hear.

**Ms Sweet:** I would say to the minister and to the other minister who is cheering me on right now that we would also need to ensure that

we're having that same conversation in the north. What does that look like? Again, I'm not saying that that's specific to oil and gas alone. We recognize that water is a real conversation in the oil and gas industry and the ability to use that, how we're treating that, and what those licences look like.

We are hearing from the government as well that there is a conversation that's happening around Technology and Innovation and data centres and whether or not there might be one of those opportunities happening up in the north around Grande Prairie. Those centres use a mass amount of water. What is the government doing as we look at this Water Act and these water licences? How is that monitoring going to happen?

We're hearing from other jurisdictions across the country right now who already have these projects in place. Quebec being a prime example where the municipalities have been using their water licence to provide water to these data centres with very limited monitoring and reporting. I would flag to the minister that this is something that cannot happen in Alberta. We need to be paying attention as we move through technology and as we're looking at these data centres. There needs to be an accountability attached to that. Municipalities should not be using their licences to provide water to data centres. They should be monitored. I would hope that, through regulation or however these licences are being developed, we're ensuring that as our economy shifts and we are moving into new and upcoming economies that require a ton of water, we are looking at: what does that mean from an environmental perspective as well as from a licensing perspective?

I also think that there is some innovation and technology that we can be looking at when it comes to water management and our agricultural communities in the north. There is massive technology that's coming through. There's innovation that's happening around tiling opportunities, around whether or not there's a different way of irrigating up in the north, and I think the north is asking for that same conversation. We know that weather is shifting. It used to be that the south was the hot and the dry part. We are having mass wildfires in the north every single year because it is getting drier. So what are we doing to ensure that we are managing the water that we have in the north? What does that look like from an economic opportunity? Then, are we doing it sustainably, and how is that being reported back to Albertans to ensure that work is being done? But also, what are those opportunities and what can those investments be? How are we working with local communities to talk about those opportunities?

I think that we have to acknowledge in this conversation that water is ultimately tied to our local economy. It is an economic driver. Without water most of our industries wouldn't exist. Agriculture wouldn't exist. Oil and gas wouldn't be able to do the work that they're doing without water. This technology advancement, these potential data centres will not have the ability or want to invest here if we don't have water policy. With that happening, though, there has to be a plan that is to the north of the province all the way to the south of the province.

I do wonder, too, and I'm curious to hear from the minister, around the water treaty piece, what this means. As you've opened the Water Act and you're looking at different pieces of moving water basins, we have a treaty with the United States as well, and I just want to make sure that any shifts in movement that are happening are not going to open up any type of conversation around our water treaty to the south. I feel like, based on our relationship with the United States at this point, having any type of conversation that could potentially put our water supply with St. Mary is not ideal. Also, recognizing that because of that water treaty with the United States, it opens up all the water treaties across Canada, and

it potentially puts those other ones at risk, too, which would include our Great Lakes.

I am curious if, from a legal perspective, this has been flagged and if we are aware and if the United States, Montana have flagged any concerns around the potential changes to this act. It has always been contentious along the border there. Just because of the fact that there's irrigation, there are conversations around the dam: the dam broke, we had to rebuild the dam, all of the things. We've always had a good relationship around negotiating and managing that waterway, but with any signalling of this act, I just want to make sure that the United States isn't feeling like: what are we trying to do, and are we up to something? Has there been any analysis or notification done, really, to ensure that we're not putting any of that treaty at risk or creating any further tension that already exists along that corridor? That's another piece that I think we need to have a conversation about.

I have lots. Oh, the other thing that I find really fascinating, and the minister might think this is – I don't know. He may not appreciate this, but I do find it interesting. If you currently go on the Alberta website from the 2024 government of Alberta, the Environment and Protected Areas plan, published in October, 2024, and if you click on the link, the hyperlink, that's supposed to go to I believe it is the water management planning framework, the current minister that is listed – I feel like all of you on that side might appreciate this – is still listed as Lorne Taylor. I feel like the fact that Lorne Taylor is listed as the minister of environment on your link to the framework for water management – for those who don't know Lorne Taylor, he was the minister of environment in 1993, I believe. It might be time, Minister, to update the water management planning framework if this is our most current piece attached to the 2024 plan. I feel like it's outdated.

**The Speaker:** I think I heard a request for more legislation, but the motion was not made, so we'll go to the Member for Lethbridge-West.

**Member Miyashiro:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I rise today to speak to Bill 7, the Water Amendment Act, 2025, and before I'm called a Marxist by the other side, I want you to understand that I fully support the intent to modernize Alberta's Water Act. I thank the minister for the work that's been put in on it.

I grew up in the middle of Associate Minister Hunter's riding in Taber.

**An Hon. Member:** Name.

**Member Miyashiro:** Oh, sorry. Excuse me. I was actually calling – yeah. Sorry.

I understand the importance of water and the importance of irrigation for our economy in southern Alberta and the whole province, which is why I support this intent to modernize the act. Water is not just a resource, as we all know; it's a living system. It carries life, but it also carries a bit of risk, which is why I have to express some concerns regarding environmental health, governance, and the rights of Indigenous and municipal stakeholders.

5:20

The bill centralizes authority that weakens democratic oversight. It grants the director expanded powers to amend water licences without consent, allows the minister to authorize interbasin water transfers without legislative approval. Chief Troy Knowlton of the Piikani Nation has warned that such changes erode community trust and accountability. We must ensure that water governance remains transparent and democratic.

Transferring water between basins is not merely a technical issue, Mr. Speaker; it's an ecological threat. Interbasin water transfers pose serious risks and not just technical challenges. Such transfers can introduce nonnative flora, fauna, parasites, and pathogens into new ecosystems. Experts warn that even pretreated surface water may carry harmful biological material, and these risks are real and documented. Whirling disease, zebra mussels, chemical imbalances are just a few examples of threats that can undermine biodiversity and destabilize aquatic ecosystems. These impacts can extend far downstream, affecting communities as distant as the Northwest Territories, and as we heard, we send a lot of water to the Northwest Territories.

This bill does attempt to address invasive species, but I think it falls a bit short. It states that transfers won't be approved, in the director's opinion, if there's a risk of invasive species as defined by the Fisheries Act. However, the act only lists 52 species, and it does not include parasites or pathogens like whirling disease, which are not classified as invasive. This loophole means transfers could still occur in infected areas.

We also need to look at monitoring. Currently whirling disease is confirmed in only four river basins. This reflects limited surveillance, not safety. Without a robust system for testing and reporting water quality, parasites, and pathogens, giving the director discretionary authority risks ecological disaster.

We have to remember that each river basin is ecologically distinct, Mr. Speaker. Differences in nutrients, minerals, temperatures, and chemistry between basins mean that even treated water can alter and degrade downstream habitats. These transfers increase the likelihood of spreading nonnative species and disrupting fragile ecosystems.

We have voices from the community that are calling for caution. Jesse Cardinal of Keepers of the Water has emphasized the need for restraint. He said: I urge this Assembly to mandate independent environmental assessments and prohibit untreated water transfers. Requiring treatment would mitigate many risks. It would also likely prevent most transfers altogether since many are intended to support things like hydraulic fracturing operations. Protecting our watersheds must take precedence over industrial convenience.

The Water Act is overdue for an update, and this bill takes a big step forward. Requiring all water licence holders to report their usage is a welcome and long-needed improvement, but the bill misses a key opportunity. It doesn't include any requirement or incentive for water conservation. Most existing licences were issued without conservation in mind. Those granted before about 2001 had no obligation to conserve water. While some newer licences include in-stream objectives, most do not. Without conservation objectives, Mr. Speaker, licence holders are not required to leave any water in the river. During the last drought we relied on licence holders' goodwill to voluntarily reduce usage. That co-operation helped immensely, but it was not guaranteed, and there is no easy way for the government to assure residents that licence holders would be made to conserve water when residential consumers were conserving.

Now that we're asking licence holders to report their usage, why not also encourage or require them to meet conservation goals? Incentivizing responsible water use would strengthen our resilience in future droughts and help protect aquatic ecosystems. It would also reassure residents and municipalities that drinking water would be a priority during the drought and that government would ensure that.

I also want to add, Mr. Speaker, as yourself you are aware, being a former municipal councillor, that a vast majority of fresh water or treated water in any larger municipality is held for fire suppression. There have been times in my community, in Lethbridge, where we had the possible risk of contamination of our treated water system,

and we had to do a boil-water order in Lethbridge at the risk, and the biggest risk was for fire suppression. I think people need to understand that. That's a big part of what we have to hold water for in lots of urban municipalities.

You know, while this bill improves transparency by mandating disclosures of agreements, concerns remain. Commercial and private interests could limit the scope of disclosure. Public access to monitoring data is a positive step, but clarity is needed on how accessible and usable that data will be. I think to make this work, Alberta needs more robust water monitoring systems. Monitoring both quantity and quality is overdue but will require investments in both technology and staffing. While once we had limnologists working every major river basin, most of these positions have been eliminated. Enforcement efforts are certainly needed, but this takes enforcement staff, many of whom have been eliminated or moved to short-term contracts.

What are the projected costs of implementing these kinds of changes? We need to avoid repeating the experience of the recall legislation, Mr. Speaker, where costs were not fully considered before the bill was passed. We need to have a full appreciation for the increased staffing and technology needs since these resources do not exist currently. We have to ensure that transparency is not just promised but that it's practised.

Consultation on this bill has occurred, but I believe it's been insufficient. While the dates and locations of the consultation sessions were published, there's very little information on what was actually discussed or presented. Minister Renner, way back in March of 2011, said that the consultation and full implementation of the Water Act took nearly eight years from 1991 to 1999. That process involved extensive engagement and careful development. Significant efforts were made at that time to engage all kinds of people, not just licence holders. By contrast, the consultation for this bill was wrapped up fairly quickly. I think we need to look at making sure that the people that need to be involved in this process are involved. We're just asking simply that that happens. The timeline around the whole consultation calls into question whether the process allowed for robust engagement with stakeholders and whether the consultation was thorough.

There are other important questions, Mr. Speaker. Interestingly, I'll refer to an article that appeared in today's *Crowsnest Pass Herald*: "Bill 7 proposed a new category of lower risk transfers that could be approved by ministerial order if strict environmental limits were met."

**Ms Schulz:** Mr. Speaker, would the member accept an intervention?

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, the hon. environment minister is asking if you would allow an intervention.

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much. The member could decline, but I do just have a couple of pieces that he's raised that I would just like to ask some additional questions on. The first would be, you know, that I think the member was just suggesting that we look at things like going and making broad-scale changes to some of our older water licences. This is one of the main pieces of concern for some of the water licence holders. The reason why we decided not to do that and why we made the commitment to go and make changes to these older licences was because at a time of drought, where there already was a lot of concern in the system – and I think I've said this in question period as well – this isn't, in our interpretation, the time for additional chaos.

What I'm asking is if the member does think that we should look at upheaving all of our historical water licences at a time where we

still have significant drought clawbacks and changes to all of those licences, which would create uncertainty in the south.

**Member Miyashiro:** Thank you, Minister, for that question. I'm not saying at all that you have to have a big upheaval of the whole system. You made great gains, as I said earlier, on making changes and amendments to the Water Act. All I'm just saying is that water licence holders aren't the only stakeholders in this process. That's all I'm saying. I'm not accusing you of anything else other than to broaden out the consultation, you know, just by this much.

If I could continue with what the article read, they talked about – I'll summarize it. You don't want to hear the whole thing. "The Chiefs Steering Committee on Technical Services rejected that approach" about high-risk transfers that might go to the Legislature because they felt that

the bill went [even] further by proposing to merge the Peace Slave and Athabasca basins . . . [and the] chiefs argued [that] would enable large water diversions from the north for economic interests elsewhere. The government news release did not reference a merger, but the chiefs said any attempt to fast-track [these kinds of] transfers without full Indigenous oversight broke the Crown's duty to consult.

5:30

This is a quote.

"Since there was memory, our peoples have been connected to the vast lands and waters that Premier Smith purports to take ownership. Our stories . . .

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, I know you were quoting something, but you would have to substitute the name with the title of the person because we don't use names here.

**Member Miyashiro:** My apologies, Mr. Speaker.

. . . our songs, our rights under the sacred Treaties affirms our peoples' rights to hunt, fish, trap and gather medicines and to continue to be who we are as First Nations peoples; rights that are meaningless without clean, sufficient water given to all of us, including non-Indigenous people, by the Creator and secured under Treaty."

This was from Chief Meneen of the Tallcree tribal government in Treaty 8.

Chief Troy Knowlton of Piikani Nation in Treaty 7 explained that the government's attempt to fast-track inter-basin transfers will permanently alter ecosystems.

He goes on to say:

"They are effectively robbing Peter to pay Paul, while they strip away accountability and minimize Indigenous oversight on decisions that impact our peoples' health, wellbeing and futures . . ."

Chief Vernon Watchmaker of Kehewin Cree Nation in Treaty 6 demanded that the Government of Alberta immediately stop action on Bill 7.

As he quotes:

"[We] insist on real and legally required dialogue to establish a modern water management strategy that doesn't just 'pray for rain'. All legislation needs to uphold our Inherent right to govern water in our traditional territories, and the fundamental human right to safe, clean water. Water is not a commodity for industrial convenience; it is the lifeblood of every person on this land," said Watchmaker.

I also think that government details on measurement and reporting need to be very clear.

Chiefs called for a pause and direct talks that meet legal standards for consultation. Residents and licence holders can watch for the province's engagement details and read the bill text when it is tabled, then share feedback before it becomes law.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, municipal stakeholders have also expressed some frustration over the lack of meaningful engagement. It's worth noting that as far back as 2014, during earlier discussions on water policy, there were already calls to end the ability of municipalities to transfer or lease water. The argument was simple: municipal water should be for people. At the time many assumed that no community would ever sell off its water, but then the Crowsnest Pass council arranged to lease water to a coal mine. They were able to do this without a requirement to disclose the agreement. It was later revealed to be worth about \$1.2 million over 30 years.

This example should prompt us to revisit the question: should municipalities be allowed to transfer or lease drinking water? While this remains an unlikely occurrence, the Crowsnest Pass case is a cautionary tale about that risk. Should a municipality be able to sell their drinking water? Should they be able to do it without disclosure or transparency? The government needs to ensure that a full and respectful consultation is completed.

For many years, including my time on the Lethbridge city council, and even though the city of Lethbridge hasn't issued a direct statement on Bill 7, city council and senior administration in Lethbridge have been vocal about the need for water conservation, infrastructure planning, and drought response, which I think is addressed partially in this bill.

We also must look at the efficiency of this whole bill and implementation. It can't come at the cost of fairness, Mr. Speaker. Compressed timelines and limits on information requests can hinder a thorough review. Restrictions on appeals reduce recourse for affected parties. Let's have some balance. Let's balance administrative streamlining with any kind of procedural justice. Those who are affected by a decision of the minister or director should be able to know why that decision was made. They should have the benefit of procedural fairness, and that will often mean the right to appeal a decision. This legislation risks procedural justice.

Mr. Speaker, once again, I support the modernization of Alberta's water legislation. As I said earlier, I grew up in an area of our province that depends on water for our industry, for people, for everything that we did in southern Alberta, and I believe that with the right changes and amendments to this piece of legislation, we can make it work. So let's work with all the stakeholders to strengthen this bill before it becomes law.

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

**Mr. Kasawski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we've had a lot of bills brought before this Legislature since I got here, and may I just say that this may be the best and most relevant one. Now, I'm not sure if it's going to pass the full sniff test, but it's relevant. When I got elected to this Assembly, I did not predict some of the things we would be talking about.

I'm going to try to be easy on some of the comments I make on Bill 20 and Bill 50, Minister, but we're first going to dig into why water is so important. I'm so grateful to have a bill brought to this Legislature that has been brought forward and consulted on. Not since the LGFF have we seen policy that has been so robust and thought through in this Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, when I have thought of some of the importance of water, I do know that it's not only just important; it's critical to our growth, to our life here. We can get very esoteric here, but in real terms, like, when I look at our Industrial Heartland, it is a hundred per cent limited by the ability to bring additional water plants into that region because economic growth cannot happen in that region without the addition of access to water and good water. When we're looking at some of the things that are being talked about for growth

in the future with AI data centres, that is not possible without water. Economic growth is a hundred per cent dependent on water.

If I just dig in a little bit to the bill, though – and I saw the minister was happy to rise up and comment on things – we're opening up the Water Amendment Act, which I think for the minister and for everybody here is an extremely important thing to look at. I had a question for the minister. Just right off the beginning it talks about that “‘return flow’ means an amount of water returned by a licensee to a source of water or to the environment following a diversion of water.” I'm just wondering why you're not talking about water basins in this and what that broad term of “environment” means when you're talking about the ability to return water into a water basin? Why are we not being more specific about “water basin” and just being broad about the environment?

There is an interesting comment with regard to capturing precipitation. I think that's an interesting thing, that we've brought precipitation into it. I'm just wondering if you can capture precipitation, because it talks about “precipitation that is intercepted above the ground and captured by works,” so some sort of physical plant. Can you capture precipitation in one water basin and divert it immediately into another? That's a curiosity that is brought as a question when I look at the meaning of this because I'm not sure I can imagine what the situation is that you need to highlight that precipitation is water. I think that's self-explanatory. So I would love some explanation from the minister on those two points.

Mr. Speaker, I think the third point that I'd love to get some highlights and clarity from the minister on is water for reuse. This feels like this is where we're getting into an area that's going to probably raise some flags. It talks about how “‘water for reuse’ means a water-based liquid.” You can pour beer on a plant, but that doesn't mean it's going to grow, so are we talking about water, or are we talking about brine or something else? What does it mean by “water-based liquid”? This is something that I feel really needs to be highlighted, and I don't know if it comes into definition or if it's just something that flows, you can pour it back from one water basin to another, which raises some warnings about what's good for the environment in that case. Those are things that I would welcome to hear from the minister on this bill.

In case the minister doesn't want to get up now, then I'm just going to get into why I think this bill is so much more important than some of the other legislation that we've faced because water is so important.

5:40

**Ms Schulz:** Mr. Speaker, I'm curious if the member would appreciate an intervention. I'm always hesitant to interrupt, but in this case I'm also very eager and ready and willing to interject and provide some additional comments. I do appreciate the member's questions, especially on things like rainwater, return flow, and water for reuse. This was an area of the legislation that was largely brought up by municipalities.

First of all, I'll speak to return flow and how that works to make more water available. We rely on return flows for supporting overall water management and including that water is available for downstream uses and environmental needs as well. Of course, transboundary commitments would be included in that, too. So these amendments help us to manage that water in a more integrated way, and that does include rainwater, stormwater, waste water, as well as return flows. This then allows us to go and define what that is, what the parameters would be, how we can ensure environmental protection in those regulations and the accompanying regulations, and that helps us protect and reuse more water.

**Mr. Kasawski:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I hope later on I can find out what that means by – what was that? – not water but water-based liquids, which we've clarified doesn't always help plants grow.

Mr. Speaker, some of the other legislation that's not been as good as addressing amendments to the Water Act has largely been brought in, it feels like, for virtue signalling, ideological pandering, and advancing policies and initiatives that cost Albertans money, so I'm glad to have something brought in that is worthy of debate in this House. Instead of just removing transparency and accountability for the government, we're dealing with something that's important. How we deal with land use, how we deal with water use: fundamentally important to what this Legislature gathers together for.

We know that there is importance with regard to the impacts on our life, on agriculture. When we're going around in the combine this fall harvesting and talking about the yield and the quality of the harvest coming from the farmers – there's even a farm in Sherwood Park that is growing canola – then what the yield is is dependent on the water, so the ability for us to manage our water well is going to depend on our agricultural industry to grow or to survive in this province.

Oil and gas has an enormous number of uses. I know sometimes when I'm talking to my friends that work in the oil and gas industry, they really think they're actually not drillers or diggers; what they are is managers of water because that's critical to the extraction of those hydrocarbons from the ground. For example, you might have freeze-ups in a hole and you actually have to make sure that you inject ethanol down into the hole just to keep the oil flowing. Otherwise, the water will freeze the hole and you'll lose production out of a well. So the ability for us to manage our water smartly in examples like that is going to be important, and then we're going to have to weigh the importance of the ability to keep a well going versus another competing use for water.

Electricity: it's key. We all know that, I think. We've removed coal-fired power from the grid, which is exceptional. It's been good for the health of all Albertans. Asthma levels are down in Red Deer, Mr. Speaker, because in Wabamun they're not burning coal anymore. But they are using natural gas, and gas-fired steam generation is still going to be using water, so the ability to manage water and water basins is going to be impactful on our electricity generation. When we're looking to modern fuels that transport energy like hydrogen, that hydrogen is going to be coming from H<sub>2</sub>O. We're going to be cracking the hydrogen out of water.

So the ability to have access to water – and back to the Alberta Industrial Heartland and what we're focused on there, that access to water is going to be critical to the development of hydrogen production, which is critical as a feedstock to refineries in the area and maybe an interesting way that we mix into our natural gas and heating in our province. Our growth is dependent on our ability to manage water.

Forestry is going to be very concerned with how we are managing water between water basins because the fibres that are going to be coming from our forest are going to be impacted by the amount of water that we have.

Back to data centres. I think one of the more interesting things, Mr. Speaker, is that for data centres the water needs to be treated water. We're not just talking about precipitation and water flowing through the river. There are processes that are going to go in place to make sure that we have treated water that can go into these high-tech data centres.

Our ability to manage our water with our Water Act is going to be incredibly important. In municipalities everything from – I mean, it might not be obvious to everybody, but we need ice, actually, to pour concrete and make our roads in this province. Ice isn't just for recreation; it's also critical to construction.

**Dr. Elmeligi:** And martinis.

**Mr. Kasawski:** Yeah.

Having good management of our water is going to affect not just our drinking water and our ability to use water and household uses and commercial uses, but it's going to affect the municipalities' abilities to build.

These are the important things that we're facing. Then, at the same time, Mr. Speaker, we are also dealing with the headwaters in the Rocky Mountains. The glaciers are melting, and that forecast is not changing. It continues to be something, that those glaciers are shrinking year after year. The amount of snow that we have in snowpack is going to affect what flows into our rivers. That's where the beginning of our water comes. The amount of precipitation we have that feeds the rivers along the way is also going to be impactful.

Whenever we're talking about switching water from one water basin to another, it's critical that there's a lot of oversight and there's involvement of the Legislature. It feels like with this bill that there has been some good thought process brought into that. In some certain positions, in some water basins it's prescriptive, at the level you would think of as regulation, as to what can be approved for water transfer. And then the rest still needs to be brought before the Legislature if it's not prescribed within the bill, which is how I read it. I'm hoping I'm reading that right.

You know, if we think about the phrase "as long as the river flows" – when we look outside below at the North Saskatchewan River, I think you could walk across that river in some points here in Edmonton right now because there is a lot less water than I'm used to seeing on the North Saskatchewan River. It's been enjoyable to have a fall where we've had really nice weather for things like trick-or-treating and enjoying a playoff run and watching baseball games outside with your friends, but you get a little bit alarmed with the lack of water that we have in our environment.

Bill 7 that's been brought forward: we get to compare it to some of the other things that have been brought forward which are not as important, like the bill that brought tax increases in by referendum in this province, Mr. Speaker. But then the government ignored the fact that they could raise property taxes by 60 per cent without taking that to a referendum. So that felt like Bill 1 wasn't really that worthy of our debate. Then we had Bill 8, which invited corruption into the offices of the Premier and the cabinet. Really not worthy of our debate.

Coming back to water, when I think of all the uses we have for water: phenomenal place to be discussing it. I hope that land use comes up because Alberta is probably ready for an overarching discussion about how we use land. We haven't looked at water for 25 years, as the minister pointed out. I don't know if we've looked at land overall in our province since we were a million people. We're at 5 million people now, Mr. Speaker. How we use our land may be different than decades ago, and it's probably worth planning for the next 100 years for this province.

We had a debate here on the Consumer Protection Act for life leases, but there are people strung out with their life leases in this province because we didn't take the opportunity to help people with existing life leases. It was a missed opportunity in this Legislature. We brought in some legislation that brought political parties . . . [interjection] Oh, Mr. Speaker, if the minister heard something else from earlier that we'd want to discuss, that sounds good.

5:50

**Ms Schulz:** As the member has gone on a slight departure to talk about other bills he would not like to have seen in the Legislature, I thought that might be an appropriate point to jump in and answer the question that he asked before. Now, any of the members

opposite who had the honour of serving in government likely know a little bit about the curse of legislative drafting. The lawyers – there are many that work in government and help us with the drafting of legislation – advised that this is the best definition we could use. We cannot say “water” when “water” refers to water for reuse. Welcome to legal legislative drafting. So this was the best and most appropriate way that the legislative drafters said that we could use that definition in the legislation.

Thank you for the opportunity to jump in and provide a fun fact and some interesting process and background on why the wording is what it is. We are not referring to anything other than water for reuse.

**Mr. Kasawski:** Well, Mr. Speaker, now I’m more worried. I’m worried that a microbrewery in Sherwood Park is going to take water, ship it into Athabasca, and that’s going to be called water transfer.

**The Speaker:** It’s going to go through your kidneys first.

**Mr. Kasawski:** Mr. Speaker, how are we doing for time now?

**The Speaker:** Three minutes.

**Mr. Kasawski:** Three minutes.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to raise some questions. I appreciate the minister responding to some of them here in debate, and I look forward to discussing it further during bill debate as we go through the process of legislation.

**The Speaker:** Just before I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, I will apologize for saying anything at all.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Oh, sure. Now that you’re in the Speaker’s chair, you’re happy to apologize. Better late than never, I suppose.

I am pleased to rise and offer some comments on Bill 7, the Water Amendment Act, 2025. I want to echo some of the concerns that my friends from Banff-Kananaskis and Lethbridge-West raised with respect to interbasin transfers, both the science around them, the ecological concerns that those propose as well as some concerns that I have around my understanding of the legislative process that this bill sets out. I have some issues with the return flow requirements that are being inserted into the Water Act through this legislation. Then, finally, I want to touch on my concerns around water licence seniority.

First of all, with respect to my concerns around the potential ecological damage related to interbasin transfers. You know, the bill tries to say that we’re only going to allow lower risk transfers in certain cases, but it combines with just one definition two of the largest river basins in the province into one. I’m wondering if the minister would be willing to share with the House what scientific investigations were conducted to justify combining the two largest river basins in Alberta into one and what work has been done to demonstrate that that won’t cause the kinds of ecological damage that my friends from Banff-Kananaskis and Lethbridge-West raised in debate.

I want to add to some of the other concerns as well. They’ve spoken about the risk of invasive species, and I’m very concerned that we’re narrowly focused on only those invasive species that are set out in the legislation. The hydrology of the river basins is also at risk if these interbasin transfers are not managed correctly. You know, things like erosion, sediment load, salinity: all of those issues could cause potential problems if these interbasin transfers aren’t managed properly.

I’m concerned that by combining the Athabasca and Peace River basins into one basin that we are going to cause a whole bunch of interbasin transfer problems that we just won’t recognize because we don’t consider that to be an interbasin transfer anymore. Moreover, how are we going to manage those other risks when considering interbasin transfers between other basins?

You know, when you review the legislation, it looks like that maybe there was some thought put into how to evaluate what a lower risk transfer is. We see one cubic metre per second of flow if you’re transferring from the Hay River Basin and four cubic metres per second or lower, if prescribed in the case of transfer, for many other major river basins. I’m wondering if the minister at some point during debate would be willing to share with the House where those numbers come from and what science that was. I know I sound like a hypocrite, but I hope that she could add it at some other point because I want to get these other questions on the record. This may be my only chance to speak because our whips are tyrants here in this caucus.

The second question that I have is with respect to the process that is to be followed. If I understand the legislation correctly, we can allow an interbasin transfer either by special act of the Legislature or by a ministerial order authorizing the director to authorize that transfer. I don’t understand, like, if it’s only just the lower risk transfers that can be authorized. I’m particularly concerned that these lower risk authorizations don’t have the same public consultation requirements that other interbasin transfers have. I’m wondering if the minister can explain why the public consultation requirements were weakened when deciding on how those interbasin transfers would be managed.

With respect to return flow requirements – and my friend from Sherwood Park raised some of his concerns with that as well – it looks to me like this is a new piece that’s being put into the Water Act. It’s surprising to me that we’re now talking about return flows when we know that the environment department has not done the work required to set water conservation objectives or in-stream flow needs in any of the river basins where we said that we were going to do those things. How is the ministry going to manage these return flow requirements in the absence of water conservation objectives or the requirement for in-stream flow needs? I am curious to get answers to those questions as well.

It’s interesting that a lot of the pieces of legislation allow amendments only to reduce return flow requirements. I’m wondering what the process will be if in fact we decide that we need to increase the return flow requirements. I hope the minister can clarify that process as well.

Finally, with respect to water licence seniority, the minister has talked about the streamlining and the efficiency gains that we’ll see by allowing one person who holds several different licences to combine those licences and then, according to the legislation, “if requested by the licensee, assign to the resulting licence the numerically highest priority number of all the amalgamated licences.” Now, in response to the question from the Member for Lethbridge-West about throwing the system into chaos, this will absolutely throw the system into chaos. If incumbent water licence holders can combine all of their licences and assign them the highest priority that they have, that dramatically affects the rules of the game when it comes to water licensing requirements in this province, Mr. Speaker. I’m wondering if the minister has evaluated how many potential water licence amalgamations could happen and what the impact of those changes to water licence priority assignments will be on how we’re going to manage those things.

That reminds me. One of the final questions that I had with respect to interbasin transfers: if the donor basin will necessarily

see a reduction in water, how are we going to manage the water priorities in those basins? Who loses water in those cases?

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the minister's contributions to debate. Thank you very much.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, it is 6 p.m., which means the House is adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]



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