



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, November 18, 2025

Day 11

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 31st Legislature

Second Session

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

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Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
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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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Party standings:

United Conservative: 47

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 2

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 18, 2025

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us pray.

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members students from Hillview school, which is my neighbourhood school. If I was in grade 6, that's probably where I would go. Today we have 31 members in one gallery and 25 in the other, joined by their teacher as well as a number of parent volunteers. Students from Hillview, I invite you all to stand up and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Nenshi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My very first school introduction. To you and through you, it is my pleasure to rise today to introduce a group of grade 6 students who are here from St. Martin's Catholic school, and did they ever perform beautifully at the Holodomor reception that we just had. I ask that they all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Member Irwin: Well, gosh darn it. I am also so excited to introduce a grade 6 class, and this time it is the incredible grade 6 students from Virginia Park school. If they could please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you Carol Slukynski, the community leader and co-chair of hosting Ukrainians in Fort Saskatchewan; Jan Lehmann, representing the chamber of commerce of Vegreville; and from the fabulous county of Lamont Reeve Aaron Wick, Deputy Reeve Neil Woitas, and councillors Roy Anaka, John Uganecz. Would you all please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you my constituent the Hon. Douglas Roche, former Canadian Senator, parliamentarian, ambassador for disarmament, and an officer of the Order of Canada. With him is his partner, Margaret Shone, former counsel for the Alberta Law Reform Institute, officer of the Law Reform Commission, founding member and past president of CASA Mental Health, and an officer

of the Order of Canada. I ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you Dr. Jennifer Njenga, who is a constituent and a renowned primary care and public health physician with over 22 years of clinical and leadership experience across eight countries. She is the recipient of the platinum jubilee medal and was named woman of the year by When African Women Talk this year. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. McDougall: Mr. Speaker, it's my extreme pleasure to introduce to you and through you the Alberta Student Executive Council for their annual advocacy days. ASEC represents tens of thousands of postsecondary students across Alberta, championing affordability, accessibility, and high-quality education. I ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce Michael O'Neill, accompanied by his daughter, Meghan. Michael is a frequent visitor to the Legislature, often visiting us here. In the coming days he'll be retiring after 47 years employed as a teacher with the St. Paul education regional division. He was here until 2 in the morning watching the government shred the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Who knows? Maybe he'll watch them do it again today. Please rise and receive the . . .

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors.

Mr. Dreeschen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to welcome from the incredible constituency of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake the entire Red Deer county council, that is here in Edmonton for RMA: councillors Herzberg, Hansen, Brewster, Carly Hansen, councillor Depalme as well as councillors Ritz and Girard, and Mayor Ramsay. I ask that they all rise and please receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Member Irwin: I'm honoured to rise and introduce Sherry Heschuk, who is a constituent of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and is here today due to the many concerns she has around housing, houselessness, as well as Bill 7 and water. Thank you for all you do, Sherry.

The Speaker: Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you I'd like to introduce Rod Olstad, Richard Merry, and Peter Loney from the Edmonton chapter of the Council of Canadians. They're here today to hear debate about Bill 7, and they're concerned about water quality and quantity into the future. Please rise and receive the warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you no stranger to this building, to many in this Chamber, Kristen Lawson. She's a board member with Wild Horses of Alberta Society who works closely with the government of Alberta to support the humane care and responsible management of our province's free-roaming wild horses. Please join me in welcoming Kristen to the Assembly here today.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I'm excited to introduce Taramay Curtis, a constituent and volunteer, a 12-year Canadian Armed Forces medic veteran, a musician, and a paramedic. You never know when you're going to need AISH. Taramay has needed it, and she's deeply concerned about waiting eight years for rental subsidy. I'll be tabling her letter later about the clawback that the UCP has issued on AISH recipients. Please rise and receive our warm welcome, Taramay.

The Speaker: Are there any more?

Hon. members, we did okay today, but I'll remind you that there's a time limit on the introductions. I only say that because we want everybody to have that opportunity when the time comes up, and it's also no time to sneak in a political speech.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

Government Caucus

Mr. Nenshi: My first member's statement, too, Mr. Speaker.

I've been in this House a little over two weeks now, and, if you'll indulge me, I have an observation. I've been watching my colleagues opposite. Some of them have pretty good poker faces. Some of them seem alarmed or upset by what they're being asked to do by this Premier. Many of them look like they're questioning their life choices.

No doubt, Mr. Speaker, every one of us was elected because we believe in public service. We were elected by our neighbours to do good things for our neighbours. We ran in elections where we promised what we would do, but this government has abandoned any sense of its principles, its priorities, and its promises.

Some of the folks opposite were elected because they're libertarians. They believe in individual rights, personal freedom, and small government. They should be asking themselves why they work for a government that systematically strips away these rights, the rights of property owners to do as they will with their property. It strips away rights from vulnerable people, even knowingly, for the first time in Alberta history, passing laws they know to be unconstitutional using the notwithstanding clause.

Some of them were elected because they were Progressive Conservatives. They believe in public services and fiscal discipline. Yet we learned today that this government, having not consulted anyone or seen any case studies of success, is about to make you pay to see a doctor and privatize health care. And now their party is suing their former members for calling out corruption and trying to represent their regions.

This is not a surprise; the Premier has talked about these things for a long time. But more than a third of the folks opposite are now under threat of recall, with more to come, and the Premier doesn't defend them. I remind this Assembly that conservative members have kicked out multiple leaders for far less than this, and I'm wondering when the members opposite will stand up for their own principles, their own values, and our democracy.

The Speaker: Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Holodomor Memorial Day

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to recognize Holodomor Memorial Day, a solemn occasion observed on the fourth Saturday of November here in Canada and around the world. Holodomor is a term that reflects the horror of hunger, a slow, painful death, suffering that was deliberately

inflicted on millions of Ukrainians by the Soviet regime in the early 1930s.

1:40

In an effort to crush Ukrainian identity and push rapid industrialization, Joseph Stalin carried out a campaign of deliberate mass starvation. Borders were sealed, food was confiscated, and millions of people living in Europe's breadbasket were left to starve. We may never know the exact number of lives lost between 1932 and '33. The scale of the genocide and the Soviet regime's suppression of information make it impossible to do more than an estimate, but we know the toll was in the millions.

As a descendant of Ivan Pylypow, one of the first Ukrainian settlers to Canada, and as the parliamentary secretary for settlement services and Ukrainian evacuees representing the constituency with the largest Ukrainian-Canadian population in Alberta, I feel a deep responsibility to keep the memory of this tragedy alive and to ensure future generations understand its lessons. Despite Stalin's attempt to erase Ukrainian identity, he failed. The Ukrainian people endured. They outlasted the regime and sought to destroy them.

Today Ukraine faces another grave threat to its existence. Vladimir Putin's invasion has violated Ukrainians' sovereignty and caused immense suffering and loss of life, reminding us that freedom and democracy must never be taken for granted. On this Holodomor Memorial Day we remember those who perished in the famine decades ago, and we stand with the brave women and men defending freedom, democracy, and their very survival today. [Standing ovation]

Holodomor Remembrance

Member Eremenko: The Holodomor was a man-made famine that decimated Ukraine in 1932, 1933. It was a genocide engineered by an oppressive Stalinist regime against a Ukrainian population who resisted Soviet policies. It was starvation as a weapon, as a tool of repression and of control, which led to indescribable suffering, and it was facilitated alongside a campaign to quash Ukrainian political and intellectual leaders – teachers, writers, and artists – who were seen as a threat to an expansionist agenda.

It was no wonder Ukraine was in the crosshairs. They were the breadbasket of Europe, after all, and though the peasantry and subsistence farmers had little in material wealth, the harvests were fruitful and their culture was unique and celebrated. But in 1932 a vicious and devastating strategy was implemented by the centralized government. Impossible quotas left nothing for the farmers themselves, and when quotas weren't met, seed and farming tools were confiscated. The migration of farmers and their families away from the countryside was forbidden, and if a peasant was found to be hiding food, they were usually sentenced to death. It's estimated at least 4 million Ukrainians died.

In 2008 the government of Canada passed the Ukrainian Famine and Genocide Memorial Day Act. On the fourth Saturday of every November we are called to remember the victims of the Holodomor and to promote the fundamental freedoms of a democratic society. Ukraine is defending those freedoms now in 2025. Tragically, impeding access to food and aid or denying the people to produce their own food continues as a tactic of oppression and war around the world. We should never see it as anything else.

Thank you. [Standing ovation]

Seniors' Supportive Housing in Trochu

Mrs. Sawyer: In the town of Trochu we saw a historic commitment to our seniors. I'm pleased to announce that we've broken ground

on the Trochu seniors supportive living and St. Mary's health care centre. This new facility will include modern amenities such as exercise spaces, activity and workshop areas, a spa, an underground parking lot, and, most importantly, a family guest suite. Guest suites will give our seniors the ability to host family and friends, because we understand the importance of community and connection. Additionally, it will create room for 40 supportive living and long-term care spaces, which is an increase from the current 28, while also creating 18 new independent living units managed by Trochu Housing Corporation.

What I'm most proud of is that the town of Trochu and the surrounding communities banded together, with help from our government, to fund the project. Just this past weekend a fundraiser was held through the Trochu housing society, with more than half of their goal already committed before the night even began. People from all over Kneehill county came out in droves to support this cause because they recognize the importance of this project to our senior community, and I'm proud that our government has committed more than \$21 million to support this essential community resource.

Mr. Speaker, unlike major city centres, rural communities struggle to keep their seniors home. As they age, we often lack the resources to care for them. This new facility is an exciting step. It will allow our aging population to continue to live in the communities that they helped build. Aging is not an easy process, and we want to ensure all seniors in Alberta are provided with supportive living and the services necessary to them. Our government recognizes seniors are the backbone of our communities. They're the first to volunteer at community events, they mentor our youth, and most importantly, they are our family.

Communicable Disease Prevention

Ms Hoffman: When I was a kid, governments had ideologies, but they also cared about the public interest. In the 1990s the Alberta government warned the public about measles, funded research and public health, and then worked to educate everyone about vaccine-preventable diseases, and we eliminated measles. I'm sorry to say that measles is back, and under the UCP Alberta has had the highest rates of infection in North America. A newborn baby whose mother contracted measles while in utero died.

When I was a kid, public health nurses came to our schools to vaccinate kids and educate us. Public health officials communicated regularly about things like the risks and consequences of sexually transmitted infections, and we knew the ways that we could reduce our risk of transmission. Now rates are dangerously high, and some public health workers warn that antibiotic-resistant strains are on the rise. As a result, we've seen dozens of stillborn babies earlier in the last two years because of congenital syphilis.

Over the weekend we learned about a tuberculosis outbreak in Edmonton identified the previous month, but the government sat on the news.

What do these things have in common? They're all preventable. They were eliminated or in significant decline before the chaos that we saw with our health care system, particularly in public health. It feels like the UCP government just doesn't care. Public health officials deserve a government that empowers them to share information, and we deserve a caring and competent Premier and cabinet.

Allow me to lay out some facts. Vaccines save lives. They are effective and safe. Condoms and regular testing stop the spread of sexually transmitted infections. And you can reduce your risk of TB by covering your cough, washing your hands regularly, and avoiding close contact with others. Stay home if you're sick.

If the UCP won't take public health seriously and they won't stop muzzling experts, the best thing you can do is change the government.

Youth Employment

Member Hoyle: Alberta's young people are the key to making sure that our province will be stable and prosperous for years to come. We need young people to get educated, enter the workforce, and get good-paying jobs here so that they stay in Alberta and build the lives they want.

Yet our youth are struggling to get ahead with this UCP government as Alberta faces some of the largest job losses in the country. Alberta's unemployment rate is the highest it's been since August of 2017, and the picture is even bleaker for youth. The unemployment rate for returning students 15 to 24 hit almost 18 per cent this summer, the highest since 2009, and this isn't just a one-off spike. Oh, no. Since 2019, when this government was elected, Alberta has had the highest youth unemployment rate 16 times in Canada.

You'd think this would be enough to make the UCP government pause and ask themselves: what could we be doing to support young people looking to find good-paying jobs? But there's no doubt that years of cuts, chaos, and corruption from the UCP government are scaring away investments and jobs. Experts are telling us that stronger collaboration between levels of government, postsecondary institutions, and employers could give youth the training and experience they need to succeed in today's job market.

Well, we know collaboration isn't the government's strongest suit. Instead of working on real solutions, the UCP is focused on pointing fingers at the federal government, at newcomers, and even at youth themselves for not having driver's licences. This government's wasteful spending, flip-flopping, and economic instability are leading to job cuts and wages that don't keep up with the cost of living.

It's not all doom and gloom, though, thank goodness. Better is possible, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's youth can count on Alberta's New Democrats to always be focused on affordability, protecting their paycheques, and boosting wages so we can all be part of a strong economy.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request unanimous consent to move to one-minute bells for the remainder of the afternoon sitting, including the first bell in Committee of the Whole.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Oral Question Period

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

Education Policies

Mr. Nenshi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning I heard the Premier give quite the speech at the Alberta School Boards Association. She sounded, for all the world, like someone who just discovered that schools and teachers exist, which is weird given that ... [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Nenshi: . . . she was an elected school board trustee, even though she was fired from that job. But she had a number of interesting things to say. First, she suggested that she doesn't really believe in inclusive education and that students with particularly complex needs should be segregated in their own classrooms except maybe for music and gym. Is this official government policy now?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll be releasing the result of our aggression and complexity task force, and I can tell you that if the member opposite actually talked with teachers, you would hear some of the concerns that they have with managing the complexity in their classroom. One of the teachers I spoke with suggested that we look at the Saskatchewan model. I've mentioned that many times. They have special classes with no more than 15 kids, one teacher, two education assistants in order that we're able to give the dedicated support that those kids deserve and need and also to create better conditions in the classroom. We're listening to teachers. We'll have more to say when that complexity task force report is released.

Mr. Nenshi: Well, I'm thrilled the Premier finally spoke to a teacher and didn't rely on a tweet, but certainly this morning she sounded like it was the first teacher she'd ever spoken to.

She also said this morning that she was shocked to learn that there are no support materials for teachers to use her new curriculum and that teachers – ready? – pay out of pocket to support their classrooms. This was news to her. Of course, it's news to no teacher, no parent, and no one who cares about public education. Her solution, however, was that every teacher should have a prescribed set of PowerPoint slides and lesson plans that they must use to teach the UCP curriculum. Is this also now government policy?

Ms Smith: Oh, my goodness. The member opposite wasn't listening very closely. I had a number of teachers who said to me that they found it very useful to use the various materials that had been provided through distance learning. What they asked is: why aren't more teachers made aware that these materials exist so that they can begin from a starting point that allows them to personalize it? These are ideas that are coming from teachers. I know the member opposite doesn't talk to teachers, isn't interested in listening to their advice. We are on this side, and that's the reason why we not only have the task force committee, but we also have the report, which we'll be releasing shortly.

Mr. Nenshi: We're up to a number of teachers. I think it's two. Certainly 51,000 of them did not agree with this government stripping their rights.

She further said that you do not need an education degree to teach and that the minister with a PhD in history can teach university and he should be able to teach in regular schools. Now, I'm a university professor, and I'd have a lot of trouble with grade 7s, let me tell you. Does the Premier now believe that any subject matter expert with no experience in pedagogy, classroom management, or educating students with complex needs can be thrown into a classroom? If so, will she be closing the schools of education?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we know that we have a high demand for trades education. I would no more expect that a teacher would be able to immediately teach welding or plumbing or electrical engineering, but if you have a welder or a plumber or an electrician able to take a one-year teacher certification so that they can teach

those dual-credit courses in school, that's absolutely something we're going to look at. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, my standing up was not an excuse for people on either side, in this case the government side, to chirp in. We heard the question; let's all hear the answer.

The Premier.

Ms Smith: I'm finished, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The member.

Election Recall Legislation

Mr. Nenshi: Mr. Speaker, a leaked government memo, which I understand was the topic of an emergency UCP caucus meeting last night, suggests nine ways to disembowel the recall bill that this government had put into place. Man, oh, man, they are scared now that one-third of them are under a recall petition. I really feel like a broken record here, but the Premier has long been a fan of recall. She loves recall; she's cheered for recall through her entire career. Now that it's hit her people, she's worried. So is the Premier going to recall her recall legislation?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have indicated that there are some procedural flaws in the recall legislation. When the government brought it in, they adopted legislation that was in British Columbia. As we've seen how it's rolled out and been weaponized, we realized that it's not fair to the individual who is being petitioned against. We're having conversations about what potential changes we might make in order to ensure procedural fairness. When we come to a conclusion on whether any of those changes need to be made, we'll let the Assembly know.

Mr. Nenshi: I appreciate that she will "let the Assembly know" as opposed to bring it forward for debate in the Assembly, which says a lot about how the Premier thinks about democracy.

Now she's talking about weaponizing recall because it's against her own people. She used to be a huge fan of it. When Mayor Gondek was being recalled, she said to Rick Bell, "I think giving the power to the people is an important aspect of making sure politicians keep their word." She further went on to say, "I think it's an important part of democracy." Apparently, not anymore. Can the Premier confirm that she and the government are actually looking at these nine changes?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've said a number of times that we are looking at procedural fairness and whether there are any changes that need to be made to the legislation to ensure procedural fairness. I mean, MLAs who are facing recall should be notified directly from the elections officials that they're facing recall. They should be allowed to start spending money in defence of themselves. There shouldn't be unions that are called upon to parachute in people by bus or with money that is untraceable in order to run these campaigns. There's a few problems; we're looking at ways in which we can fix them.

Mr. Nenshi: You know, I'm new here, Mr. Speaker, but I thought that government actually looked at its legislation before it passed it and not waited until the horses had left the barn to try and fix all the problems with it.

Some of these leaked proposals are fascinating, and I suspect we might end up going through more of them on future days. Option one: should the Recall Act be amended to only allow one recall petition at a time per registered party? Please do that one, but be careful what you wish for because it means Albertans will focus their anger on one member. Is the Premier planning on doing that?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, we're looking at areas where there might be procedural unfairness. We're going to be continuing our consultation. If any decisions are made, there will be legislation that will come forward, and we'll all have a chance to debate and vote on it.

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

Mr. Nenshi: Of course, none of those nine things are actually about procedural fairness; they're about making recall harder. But we'll get to that later.

Physician Compensation Legislation

Mr. Nenshi: Mr. Speaker, reporting in the *Globe and Mail* today suggests that this government is looking to go further in privatization and American-style two-tiered health care than any provincial government has ever done since the introduction of medicare. Can the Premier confirm that she is currently preparing legislative amendments to allow family doctors and others to practise in the public and private sectors simultaneously so they can decide whether they will use their limited time with patients who pay more in the private sector or less in the public sector?

Ms Smith: I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that we are very pleased with what we're seeing among surgeons and their ability to increase the number of surgeries that are being provided in Alberta. Many of those surgeries are being done in chartered surgical centres. In fact, we've seen an increase of 40,000 to about 65,000. Unfortunately, we have not seen the same level of increase in AHS. What we're aiming to do is create a number of different supports and amendments – many of them were announced in our acute care action plan last week – in order to improve the performance, get more surgeries done, and eliminate wait-lists. [interjections]

The Speaker: When I called Edmonton-Glenora's name gently, that was not a cue to keep going on. It was a gentle hint to maybe let me hear the answer.

The hon. leader.

2:00

Mr. Nenshi: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Even by the Premier's standards that was a remarkable nonanswer. We've heard all of that before. What was leaked today has nothing to do with the chartered surgical facilities and what she's talking about.

I'm curious what the Premier thinks could be accomplished with this change. It's like going to Canadian Tire and there's a huge line, so they open a second till, but the same cashier has to cover both tills. It doesn't really help anyone. But we're not talking about winter tires here. We're talking about people's fundamental right to health care. What is the government trying to accomplish with this? What experts have they talked to? What case studies have they seen that this will help in any way? The ones we've seen . . .

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the elements of our acute-care action plan was to increase surgeries, 50,000, so that we

can eliminate the number of people who are on a waiting list longer than medically recommended. We're looking at a variety of ways to do that by investing not only in expanding operating rooms in our hospitals but also expanding support for chartered surgical facilities as well as ensuring that funding follows the patient so that surgeons are rewarded for doing more surgeries. There are a number of wonderful examples in the public system. I encourage the member opposite to look at Humber River. That's the kind of thing we think we should do more of.

Mr. Nenshi: She's really scared or perhaps unprepared to answer the question about family doctors. What is she doing with family doctors?

In the 2023 election the Premier said, quote: I believe no one should ever pay out of pocket to see a family doctor. That's not what she said in the past in her long career, but she did say it in the election. Setting that aside, now she's radically changed her mind with no consultation. I'm not scared of Albertans. I'm willing to go to Albertans and see what they think of this. Will the Premier commit today to dissolve this Legislature and cause an election on this issue? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. It's your question period. If you want to bang the whole time, go ahead.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, no. But let me tell you what we will do. We are going to continue to create the very best environment for doctors and specialists to work here. In 2019 there were 5,376 family practitioners; there are now 6,216. There were 5,572 specialists; there are now 6,539. We have nurse practitioners that are establishing their own practices. We've got expanded scope of practice for pharmacists, expanded scope of practice for our advanced paramedics. We're going to make sure that everyone is able to practise to the full level of their ability.

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, no one in Alberta wants the leaked plans from the UCP to make Albertans pay to see their family doctor. The Minister of Primary and Preventative Health Services told Albertans in a *Calgary Herald* op-ed, and I quote: we want to ensure you can access a family doctor without ever having to pay out of pocket. Why, then, is the same minister making plans to make Albertans pay to see their family doctor?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is misinformed. A person in Alberta, an Albertan, will never have to pay to see their family doctor. That is the guarantee that we have made. We will continue to enforce that. Stay tuned, members opposite, when we do put forward legislation in the near future.

Mr. Haji: We will be looking forward to that legislation, Mr. Speaker.

Albertans are in an affordability crisis. The last thing they have money for is to see a family doctor. Nearly 1 million Albertans cannot even find a family doctor right now. Albertans know that privatization will mean that fewer doctors will be available for public health care services. Will the minister admit that they are forcing an American-style, two-tiered health care system on Albertans today?

The Speaker: The minister of health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nothing could be further from the truth. I use that because it is actually accurate. We

have more physicians practising and registered to practise in Alberta than we have ever had in this province. We started in 2018 with 10,600 physicians, just shy of that. We now have 12,769 and more coming all the time because of the changes we have made. We are a great place for health care professionals to practise.

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, the minister should know that any health care workforce planning is not absolute numbers; it's the number of physicians per population. Albertans have increased the number of physicians per population every year up to 2019, but they have decreased and dropped since the UCP came to power. Why is the minister planning to charge Albertans to see a doctor, violating the Canada Health Act and the principles of public health care?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite again is misinformed. As I said earlier, more doctors than ever: 10,620 in 2018; we now have 12,769 and counting. We have more registered nurses than ever before. We have over 50,000 nurses. In 2018, when the members opposite were in power: 37,500. We have more nurse practitioners than ever before, a 76.9 per cent increase since 2019. I could go on and on.

The Speaker: Members, when you send me a note, if you don't sign it, it doesn't help you, and it doesn't help me. I don't know who did that.

Ms Hoffman: "Trust us," she said. "We won't privatize health care," they said. The Premier said that she'd make health care better if she was elected, but that was when she was running in a general election. Now that the UCP is in government, they're really showing us who they are. Leaked cabinet documents reveal that the current government wants doctors to move Albertans from public health care into an American-style model. The government has no mandate to do any such thing. "There's no two-tiered, American-style health care agenda" is what they said in the election. If the Premier really thinks this is a winning issue, will she call a general election and let the voters decide?

The Speaker: I see two ministers standing. Somebody's got to decide. Okay. The minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Leading jurisdictions like Denmark, the Netherlands, the U.K., and France all use hybrid models that allow physicians to flexibly serve their population in public and private settings. In fact, this also takes place in a place called Canada. It takes place in Quebec and New Brunswick, and here we've had great success in Alberta augmenting the majority of our surgeries, which are provided in-hospital, 80 per cent, with 20 per cent provided in our chartered surgical facilities. None of this occurs without a willing Alberta health care professional and a willing Albertan. Why are the members opposite opposed to connecting those two? [interjection]

The Speaker: Hon. member, Leader of the Opposition, you had nine questions. Now it's somebody else's turn.

Ms Hoffman: Given that the minister just admitted to the government's privatization agenda in health care and given that Albertans don't want to pull out a credit card when they go to see a doctor – they've told Conservative Premiers this time and time again, and the current Premier knows that it's a losing issue; that's why she didn't run on it – given that the leaked cabinet documents demonstrate the UCP is moving full speed ahead on American-style, pay-as-you-go health care, which minister over there is

comfortable, if one of their loved ones has cancer, having to pull out a credit card to pay for access?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, none of that is accurate. We have made a guarantee to Albertans that we intend to fully implement. We will make sure that no one has to pay out of pocket to see their family physician nor pay out of pocket for essential services. Why do the members opposite have such issue when New Brunswick and Quebec have the ability to have better access than we do? We want to make sure that Albertans have as much access or more than other countries and other provinces.

Ms Hoffman: Given that that health minister just admitted that privatization is true, given that this health minister just said he's wrong, given that it's in black and white, it's clear that the UCP is doubling down on American-style pay for health care with their cuts to public services, their chaos in org charts, and their closed hospitals, with corruption, where wealthy insiders get richer and everyday Albertans have to pay. The documents have been leaked. Will the government admit that privatization was the plan all along and, if they really like it, call an election and let voters choose? [interjections]

2:10

The Speaker: Order.

The minister of health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know the members opposite really like political theatre, but what Albertans really like is better access and more timely access to health care. What we inherited from the members opposite was not a good system. We now have more doctors, more nurses, more... [interjections] Oh, they're continuing to argue. The facts remain that we have now an increase in physicians. We have a 27.5 per cent increase in licensed practical nurses, up 15.4 per cent from when they were in power. Psychiatric nurses: nearly 10 per cent more, reaching over 52,000 registered... [interjections]

The Speaker: When I stand up, it's time for everybody else to sit down.

Hon. members, more than one of you has admitted to sending me the note without the signature, so we're having fun now.

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

Greenhouse Gas Emission Reduction

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For many years Alberta industry has led the way on responsible energy production and development. While the members opposite refuse to celebrate Alberta's environmental success, on this side of the House we'll always stand up to defend our energy industry and tell our environmental story, a story of increasing production and significantly reducing methane emissions through technologies, not taxes, year after year. We can do both here in Alberta, so to the minister of environment and parks: can you please tell the House how Alberta will continue to lead the way on this?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment and parks.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Alberta is a global leader in reducing methane emissions while growing production to record levels. Industry here has seen methane emissions reduced by 52 per cent while saving industry about \$600 million compared to the federal approach. We're doing this by working with industry, not against them, and by focusing on technology that allows responsible

production to grow, not punitive regulations that drive investment out of Canada. Just last week we announced \$29 million for two new programs funded through the industry-funded TIER program to continue to keep this momentum going.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the uncertainty we're seeing in the global economy and supply chains around the world, it's important for Alberta to secure our economic future and unleash the full potential of our resource advantage. Given that both globally and nationally demand for energy is on the rise with no end in sight and further given that Alberta is one of the premier jurisdictions that fill the demand for safe, affordable, and reliable energy people need, to the same minister: how does Alberta's common-sense approach for environment continue to lead the world in our economy?

The Speaker: The minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unlike the members opposite, we'll continue to defend our energy sector because we know the world needs our responsible, reliable, affordable, and secure energy. This year Alberta set a record, producing over 4 million barrels of oil a day while emissions continue to decline. We still face challenges with federal government policies continuing to create uncertainty and drive investment elsewhere. I know Albertans as well as our caucus are grateful for the Premier's leadership on this front to push for change and common sense. That's leadership: partnering with industry, securing investment, and focusing on keeping Alberta competitive.

The Speaker: Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the minister for her answer. Given that we know that there is quite a lot of incorrect information out there on Alberta's environmental record, mostly from radical activists like the NDP, who only seem to want to shut down our major industries with no environmental benefits, and further given that Alberta is not just a global leader in energy – we're also leaders across the board on environmental stewardship and reducing emissions, as the minister stated – to the minister: can you please once again remind the House of Alberta's environmental record, which is second to none?

Ms Schulz: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is not just an energy leader; we are also global leaders in environmental stewardship. I will happily remind the Legislature of our record: overall emissions down 9 per cent, methane emissions down 52 per cent, emissions per barrel down 26 per cent, transportation emissions down 12 per cent, electricity emissions down 60 per cent. Shutting in and shutting down production is not the answer. The world needs more responsibly produced energy, not less, and we are ready to be that jurisdiction of choice for safe, affordable, reliable energy that the world and communities right across Canada need.

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

Election Recall Legislation (continued)

Member Ceci: Thank you. Permit me a trip down memory lane, Mr. Speaker. "Recall legislation adds to our democratic rights, and having it here in this province continues to make Alberta the land of the strong and the free." And who do we have to thank for this ode to freedom? Why, none other than the hon. House leader

speaking in this very Chamber in defence of the recall legislation his government would now like to scrap. To the minister: what's with the sudden change of heart?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A trip down memory lane. The Recall Act was introduced in 2021 as part of our commitment to increase democratic accountability. Of course, the NDP has utilized it as a weapon to try and create disruption within this province and within this House. The Premier has said that we are looking at ways to make sure that accountability and transparency are paramount, and that's exactly what we're looking at. Recall still exists, the act is still in place, and we're just looking at ways to make it better.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Member Ceci: Thank you. Given that this government has no problem using the notwithstanding clause to rob Albertans of their constitutional rights and given that the hon. House leader also stated in this Chamber that "when MLAs do not do their job correctly, their constituents should not be left unheard" and given that now citizens are only availing themselves of recall measures this government offered up to them, Minister, why are recalls suddenly such a bad idea? If this government is so concerned about recalls, why doesn't the hon. House leader just get behind a general election?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member should know that recall still exists in this province. It's here. The act was proclaimed in 2021; it hasn't gone anywhere. What we're looking at is making sure that the processes are being respected, that the elections are not being overturned unreasonably, that people are using it for what it was intended to do, and that is to deal with bad actors within this Legislature. Weaponizing it by the NDP and by the unions was never the intention, and we're not going to let that happen.

The Speaker: Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you. Given that the Premier and this UCP government have been long-standing cheerleaders of citizen-led recall petitions and given that this government pushed hard in this House to pass the recall legislation that they're now so keen to recall and given that, faced with genuine citizen-led recall efforts, now they've made a complete flip-flop on their once cherished position, to the minister I ask: is it hypocrisy, or has this government just lost its way?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice

Mr. Amery: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Our government is focused on the work that Albertans elected us to do. The Recall Act exists. The member speaks as though the Recall Act no longer exists. It's here; it's here to stay. We are looking at ways to make it better and to improve it. That's just the way it is. There's nothing wrong with that. That's what this government was elected to do. That's what we'll continue to do, and that's to improve the life for Albertans.

Energy Industry Property Tax Payments

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, rural Albertans are hard-working people who have cultivated their land for years to provide for their families

and for Albertans. Year after year we hear from landowners and municipal leaders across the province the strain placed on communities and families by delinquent oil and gas companies that do not clean up their wells or pay their fees and taxes owed. They are abandoning their wells and their responsibilities and laying it at the feet of Albertans. What is this government doing to protect Albertans and hold oil and gas companies accountable for cleaning up the mess of dumped oil and gas wells?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an important issue. I think it's the responsibility of every citizen, corporate or personal, to pay their taxes, and there's no getting out of it. It is their moral responsibility. This government agrees with RMA and every single municipal council I speak to that says these companies need to pay their taxes. The vast majority of oil and gas companies do, but those who don't: we need to be addressing it, which is why we've set up PTAs, when it comes to a working group, with RMA to make sure we're getting the solutions done. We have the PERC program, which we're going to have even more accessibility to. And of course, there are going to be a number more policies coming forward in collaboration with municipalities to this end.

2:20

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that it's been six years since this government has been in power and given that rural Albertans are tired of empty promises from companies and this government to clean up the mess and given the burden of unpaid municipal property tax amounts to a whopping \$254 million, money for roads, emergency services, and local needs, and given that rural landowners wholeheartedly support the polluter-pay principle, that those who make the mess should clean it up, can the minister tell Albertans why this government is not holding oil and gas companies accountable to pay their local taxes and get this mess cleaned up?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, we are holding them accountable with municipalities. We're working hand in hand to address this question to make sure that municipalities get what they're owed. It is the responsibility of every citizen, corporate or individual, to pay their taxes. No caveats. No qualifications. Full stop. This government believes that because rural Alberta municipalities along with oil and gas have built not only this province but this whole country. We need to make sure it continues to be a place that we can see positive investment happening because it's attractive. It requires services, and we need to make sure those oil and gas companies pay their taxes.

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there needs to be ethical accountability and given that Rural Municipalities of Alberta have advocated to this government requiring oil and gas developers and operators to pay municipal property taxes on oil and gas properties and given that RMA said that there should be a condition being granting the right to develop oil and natural gas resources and given that multimillion burdens are left by companies on landowners and given that rural Albertans deserve to see action by this government, not more excuses, when will the government do what RMA is asking and ensure taxes are paid before the company can develop any more resources?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, when a company ends up in receivership because of their obligations they have, those dollars first have to go to environmental cleanup. We need to make sure that we're working with the AER and RMA, that we're capturing these companies that are on the edge and making sure that they are paying their taxes first and foremost. That is a priority of this government. We will make sure that those companies that are not paying are held accountable. We need a path going forward to make sure this doesn't happen anymore. This is exactly the conversation I've had with RMA, the conversation I have with councillors every single day, and that path going forward is one that we are taking seriously, with real teeth and a policy to enforce the payment of municipal taxes.

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

Health Services Procurement Process

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Wyant report exposed systematic conflicts of interest, political interference, and misuse of funds. During question period on November 4 I asked the Minister of Municipal Affairs about sole-source contracts under his tenure as Minister of Mental Health and Addiction, but I did not get an answer. So I will ask again. To the minister: was he aware of or did he approve any sole-source . . .

Mr. Nixon: Point of order.

Mr. Guthrie: . . . contracts or grants issued through Recovery Alberta, compassionate care, or any affiliated recovery operators, yes or no? And if so, to whom?

The Speaker: A point of order was noted at 2:23 p.m.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane will permit me to leave my jacket open so he doesn't feel threatened in the Chamber, I will do that. What I would say is that this is a question to the minister who is no longer in charge of that file. I'm not quite sure where the member is going with that. I look forward to the other supplemental, but I also look forward to what would likely be . . . [interjections] Anyways.

The Speaker: Members. Order.

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, given that in late 2024 I was alerted to potential sole-source contracts and I asked my department to verify through corporate registries and given that we found the ownership behind the three recovery centres matched the group tied to the health scandal in the Wyant report and given that Infrastructure informed the Deputy Minister of Mental Health and Addiction, who advised the minister and given that the same minister told this Chamber he found no connection, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: now would be a good time to correct the record.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the member opposite is mistaken in his facts. I had done a review as I heard concerns. I found nothing of the sort was the case. If there is any information to this, I would happily have provided it to everyone who asked. I saw nothing. I followed every procedure I could. I followed every single best practice when it comes to procurement. I did not find any of the allegations the member opposite is making. I asked him multiple times whilst he was still a member of Executive Council to furnish me with any evidence he had; I received nothing. I'm

happy to speak to this to say that I acted as above board as I could as a minister.

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, given that this wasn't an oversight – it was flagged – and given that we verified, notified, and watched that warning be ignored, a familiar pattern with the UCP, and given that after the minister was notified, the ownership registry for that company behind those three contracts changed but the records remain, will the current Minister of Mental Health and Addiction table the previous minister's investigation and all sole-source contracts under his portfolio? I can help the minister identify some of those contracts.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, at the time I looked into every single accusation that the member opposite made. I asked for any information he had; furnished none. I rely on the investigation of the OAG and Judge Wyant. I complied with anything I could. I asked my deputy minister to make sure we follow all procurement procedures. The member opposite is continuing to make insinuations in this House that something inappropriate happened. I was happy to hear any information he provided at the time; I received none. I am happy to hear any information he has now; I have seen none. Until that happens, I cannot act on assumptions or insinuations. I must act on facts that I have in my hands. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Christenson Developments' Life Leases

Ms Pancholi: Developer Greg Christenson owes over \$200 million in life lease payments to 601 Alberta seniors and their families. Many of these seniors lived at the Devonshire, a Christianson development in my riding. Last year this government spent \$235,000 on a financial audit of Christenson's companies and concluded there was enough there for him to repay these seniors, but Christenson has now filed for creditor protection. Current and former life lease holders would like to see the government's audit to help them protect their own interests in these proceedings. Will the minister of service Alberta give their unredacted audit of Christenson's companies to these seniors and their families? It's an easy way to help them.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, our government believes that anyone who takes advantage of seniors should be held fully accountable, and that's what we expect in this case. Now, we understand that the Crown prosecutors' office has made a decision that was intended to help Christenson Developments continue liquidating their assets so that they can raise money to pay back seniors who held life leases with them. We'll continue to monitor the situation.

Ms Pancholi: Well, given that the question was, "Can the UCP provide their audit to these seniors to help protect them?" and given that for almost three years this government has known about the unbelievable financial mismanagement of Christenson Group of Companies yet has continued to fund up to \$4 million per year to Christenson to operate two continuing care facilities and given that the UCP has had at least three years to find another operator for these facilities, to any of the four health ministers: why is even \$1 of taxpayer money still going to a company that owes \$200 million to Alberta seniors, and when will it stop?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question, but the member is asking the wrong question. The question that she should be asking is: why didn't the NDP take care of this in 2017, when 17 life lease

holders wrote to the NDP and asked for help? When they asked for help, do you know what they did? Nothing. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, the floor belongs to the minister and only to the minister, and he's the only one that any of us should be hearing from now.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, the question that they should be asking is – they should be looking in that camera right there and apologizing to all those seniors that lost their life savings because the caucus over there chose to do nothing. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, now it's time to only hear from the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: To all the life lease holders and families who are listening right now, because I know you are: I know that you knew the minister was going to say that, and you want real help.

Given that prosecutors are now not going ahead with charges against Christenson under the Consumer Protection Act because any fine he got would only take away money from what he owes to seniors, meaning that Bill 12 is utterly useless, and given that the UCP won't commit today to give these families the financial information that they have on Christenson and given that they won't commit to stop giving public dollars to a company that has wiped out the life savings of hundreds of Albertans, it begs the question: how much of this is related to the fact that Greg Christenson is the UCP's biggest and most loyal donor?

2:30

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, I heard the member and I even saw the member looking at the camera, but you know what I didn't see? I didn't see that hon. member apologize to Albertans that they let down. You see, had they acted in 2017 . . . [interjection]

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Mr. Nally: . . . we could have had real protections in place for life lease holders. But they chose to do nothing. Well, that's not what we did, Mr. Speaker. We took decisive action. We put protections in place to ensure that what happened on their watch will not happen again.

The Speaker: A point of order was noted at 2:30 p.m.

The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Drought Damage Mitigation

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know I speak for a lot of Alberta farmers when I say that I was optimistic that this growing season would be a success. However, within the Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock constituency low precipitation caused the counties of Big Lakes, Lesser Slave River, Athabasca, Westlock, Thorhild, Smoky Lake, and St. Paul to declare states of agricultural disaster. To the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation: how is our government standing with producers and providing the support they need as they face another difficult drought-affected year?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture.

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Alberta farmers and ranchers always show remarkable resilience, and our government is standing with them. Now, one of the key steps we've taken so far is initiating a livestock tax deferral, giving producers in drought regions more flexibility to manage their cash flows. We've also made changes to low-yield

allowance so they can recover from crops affected by drought. I want to be clear in saying that we'll always stand with our producers to make sure they have the sustainable programs they need to support them during times of drought.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta's farmers and ranchers know better than anyone that water is the foundation of a strong, productive ag sector and given that producers across Alberta rely on consistent water access for crops, livestock, and community sustainability, can the same minister share how this government is improving local water storage and strengthening drought resilience to help our farmers and ranchers adapt and succeed?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Water security is absolutely essential for our farmers and ranchers and our rural communities, and we're investing in feasibility studies for new and expanded water storage projects to increase capacity, like Ardley and Eyremore. Through the irrigation rehabilitation program as well we are upgrading and modernizing irrigation infrastructure to reduce water loss, and our irrigation modernization program, a \$933 billion program, is supporting major projects that will expand storage and boost drought resilience. These are investments that ensure Alberta's producers have the reliable water they need.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many producers across my constituency continue to show determination despite challenges like reduced feed availability and given that timely and co-ordinated support is critical to sustain these livestock operations, can the same minister explain how the government is working with municipalities, agricultural service boards, and local organizations to ensure assistance reaches the right people at the right time so that farmers and ranchers are able to continue to thrive despite these dry conditions?

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is essential that we continue to work closely with our partners to ensure supports are delivered quickly to the people who need them most. At the same time, I'd like to comment that we're pushing the federal government to modernize cow-calf insurance also to continue to strengthen our business risk management programs because producers need solutions that reflect today's realities. Alberta provides the best crop insurance in the world through AFSC, coverage that is stable and built to support producers during these tough times. Our government is committed to ensuring farmers and ranchers continue to thrive and grow.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Member Kayande: Mr. Speaker, my constituents are being crushed by an affordability crisis. Groceries, rent, homes, insurance, electricity bills all cost more than they did in 2019 when this UCP government took over. This government destroyed the protection of the Balancing Pool and banned investment in new electricity projects for ideological reasons, increasing my constituents' electricity bills. Expensive electricity reduces economic growth. Why has this government so completely mismanaged the electricity file?

The Speaker: The Minister of Affordability and Utilities.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, that member is completely wrong. We have done a tremendous amount of work in the electricity grid, bringing prices down 63 per cent from their peak. When the NDP was in power, they got rid of coal-powered generation – good for them – costing Albertans \$2 billion that we still pay \$100 million a year for because of their mismanagement. They also allowed all this growth, and now we pay for it on our transmission bills.

Member Kayande: Down from the UCP peak is not down from 2019, Mr. Speaker, and given that it's not just electricity but also insurance costs that are hammering my constituents every month and given this government never seriously considered a public insurance option, claiming that \$3 billion in set-up costs to save Albertans \$2 billion a year forever is a bad deal. Now, given that the minister is a farmer who fully understands how capital investment works and would surely know that spending \$3 today to save \$2 a year forever in his own business is a good deal. Why won't he do this deal for Albertans?

Mr. Horner: Well, I wish the members opposite would listen a little more clearly when we talk about auto insurance. This is going to be a tough system change. It's a heavy lift for our department, but we're taking the biggest cost out of the system that we can while providing the best benefits in the country. You know, there are a lot of things I mentioned yesterday that we could have stuck our heads in the sand about and said that we have more hail, we have more expensive vehicles because of our higher wages. That's true, but we're committed to this system change because it's the right thing to do. January 1, 2027, we'll move forward with the care-first model.

Member Kayande: Given that insurance and electricity costs are directly under this government's control and these costs are out of control while the government says repeatedly that Albertans are on their own, as we just heard, and repeatedly tells Albertans that everything is fine and that our suffering is in our heads and not real, what is this government going to do about the cost of groceries, the number one affordability challenge that my constituents tell me about?

Mr. Neudorf: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to be part of a government that puts Albertans first every single day. That is why every single ministry works to find a path towards greater affordability. It's why we're making all the changes in our electricity system, so it's not passed on to every single ratepayer within our province nor is the taxpayer picking up the bill. Private industry is becoming responsible under our changes. That's why we're working on insurance. That's why we're working with every business across this province to make sure we put Albertans first. We are doing what we can. We're pushing back against the federal government and their overspending, which has caused the inflation in the first place.

Immigration Policies

Member Tejada: The Premier's flip-flop on population growth and immigration is shocking. Yesterday she complained that no one asked her government's permission to come to Alberta, you know, after Alberta was calling. Immigrants were blamed for the strain on social services while the Alberta Next Panel mused about withholding services from noncitizens. Now Bill 10 is poised to add citizenship on drivers' licences, perhaps for that purpose. To the Premier: exactly what services is this government planning to deny legal residents based on their citizenship?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise to answer the question from the member opposite, as it pertains to immigration. Immigration in Canada is a shared responsibility between the provinces and the federal government, but ultimately the federal government has the final say. We have asked for them to take our input into consideration when it comes to numbers. In the final years of the Harper government Canada let in over 600,000 immigrants. In the height of the Trudeau government it was 2 million. This is an unsustainable amount of growth and putting pressure on all the provinces across the country and the territories.

Member Tejada: Given that yesterday the Premier admitted that people are feeling like they're not getting the services they need and again blamed new Canadians and given that bloated contracts, privatization, and steamrolling human rights hasn't distracted Albertans from the UCP's terrible record on public services thus far, will the government admit that backlogs on health care and crowded classrooms are due to their inability to build services that all Albertans, including immigrants, need and stop piling on newcomers?

2:40

Mr. Schow: Well, Mr. Speaker, the problems we're dealing with today were not experienced between 2019 and 2015 because the NDP were in government and they were driving people out of the province and saying: no; our province is closed for investment and growth. We are a beacon of hope and opportunity. That's why people want to come here for work. That's why they want to invest here. But when you're talking about unsustainable immigration, those pressures are put on the provinces for social services like education, health care, roads, et cetera.

Member Tejada: Given that six years should be long enough for accountability and given that this Premier has said that people used to come to Canada because they wanted a job, implying that newcomers now don't want to work but at the same time blaming unemployment on them, and given that the UCP citizenship marker on ID will make folks vulnerable to discrimination when they just go about their daily lives and given that the UCP has gone all the way to Quebec to defend the notwithstanding clause being used to discriminate against religious minorities and given that we're in Alberta, can the UCP stop cutting and pasting bad policy from other jurisdictions?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, that question was a dog's breakfast of issues that are all over the place. I can tell you right now that this government and I as minister of immigration are laser focused on making sure that all those coming into Alberta are done with an economic focus. We have a tremendous upside and a skilled workforce, but we certainly need newcomers here to help us augment the work being done. That's why we want to be focused on economic migration. I'm not sure why the members opposite can't grasp this concept. We are a province rich with opportunity. Why won't they get on board with what the government is doing?

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds we will continue.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 203

Energy Storage Planning for Investment Act

Ms Al-Guneid: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am delighted to rise today to request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 203, Energy Storage Planning for Investment Act.

Alberta's energy future can be bright with pragmatic policies. This bill will advance our power sector. It will provide more affordable energy for Albertans. It will keep the lights on and improve grid reliability, and it will attract investments and create good-paying jobs in Alberta's electricity and energy sectors.

With that, I move first reading of Bill 203. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Bill 9

Protecting Alberta's Children Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move first reading of Bill 9, Protecting Alberta's Children Statutes Amendment Act, 2025.

Bill 9 will invoke the notwithstanding clause in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Alberta Bill of Rights, and the Alberta Human Rights Act to protect our children, their health, and their well-being in this province, Mr. Speaker. This bill reaffirms the core protections that we put in place last year for our children, and it will protect their childhood, reaffirm that parents are the primary caregivers for their children, and ensure that women and girls have a safe and a fair place to compete in sports here in Alberta. The voice of Alberta's Legislature will be the final voice on these laws.

Thank you.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 2:45 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Al-Guneid	Ellingson	Kayande
Arcand-Paul	Elmeligi	Metz
Batten	Eremenko	Miyashiro
Boparai	Ganley	Nenshi

Brar, Gurinder	Goehring	Pancholi
Brar, Gurtej	Gray	Sabir
Calahoo Stonehouse	Haji	Schmidt
Ceci	Hoffman	Shepherd
Chapman	Hoyle	Sweet
Dach	Ip	Tejada
Deol	Irwin	Wright, P.
Eggen	Kasawski	
Totals:	For – 48	Against – 35

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a first time]

2:50 **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: Do any members have a tabling?

Mr. Schow: I don't have a tabling, Mr. Speaker, but I would like to move a motion. I wish to advise the Assembly, if I could, that pursuant to Standing Order 7 the daily Routine may continue beyond 3 p.m. Is this a good time to do that?

The Speaker: Yes.
Tablings? Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. I have two, Mr. Speaker. The first is from Taramay, my guest from today, about AISH and ADAP.

The second is the *Globe and Mail* article where the government documents confirm privatization in health care.

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

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got a tabling from the *Edmonton Journal* calling Alberta a mecca of housing.

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the following copies of a report from RMA, Unpaid Oil and Gas Tax Survey.

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

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling here of an article talking about the radicalization of youth and that 10 per cent of CSIS terror investigations involve Canadian youth.

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

Dr. Metz: Thank, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. I have five copies of an e-mail to Minister LaGrange from Lisa G., a very busy parent.

The Speaker: Hon. member, we don't use names in here. Even if in a friendly and matter-of-fact way we still never do that.

Dr. Metz: I apologize.

To the minister of public health care from Lisa G., a busy parent describing her challenges getting COVID vaccine bookings for her children.

The second is an e-mail to the minister of health care from Pam describing the lack of availability of COVID-19 vaccines even though she lives in a mid-sized Alberta city.

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

Member Irwin: Thank you. I have a number of e-mails from Albertans urging the UCP government to not invoke the notwithstanding clause against the trans community. Absolutely egregious.

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, I have a tabling on the Alberta living wage report, a community calculation on the methodology that was produced last week by Edmonton Social Planning Council.

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

Dr. Elmeligi: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling, a letter from the Council of Canadians Edmonton Chapter stating their concerns around Bill 7, the changes to the Water Act.

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

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yet another letter from a constituent, Lara, a teacher saying that in her class she has half of the children with complex needs, and a third are English language learners with no supports.

The Speaker: Are there any more? Seeing not none but some. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite copies of an e-mail I received from my constituent Kim Villanueva. Kim is a concerned teacher and parent who unequivocally condemns the government's willingness to push forward policies that target transgender children.

The Speaker: Any other tablings?

Seeing none, I have a tabling, as it turns out. I would like to table six copies of the '24-25 annual report of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate in accordance with section 21(1) of the Child and Youth Advocate Act. The report covers the activities of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate for the period of April 1, 2024, to March 31, 2025.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Mr. Nicolaides, Minister of Education and Childcare, pursuant to the Education Act Alberta Teaching Profession Commission 2024-25 annual report.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have come to the part of the day where we deal with points of order. The first point of order was called at 2:23 by the government side. I think that one has been withdrawn by . . .

Mr. Williams: We'll withdraw.

The Speaker: It's been withdrawn. Okay. That's dealt with.

At 2:31 a point of order was called by the Government House Leader. No?

Mr. Williams: I believe all government points of order are withdrawn.

The Speaker: Okay. That's it? None? Well, I don't know whether I can give us one day without points of order. I don't think I can because they were called. [Noise in the Chamber] I'm not sure what that was. Let's just hope no one is hurt.

You know what? I see in here there's a tabling that I have to make. Do we have to go back? We can't do that now. Then I will

ask for the Assembly's apologies for this tabling that I will now make tomorrow.

Orders of the Day

Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Mrs. Sawyer moved, seconded by Mr. Dyck, that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows:

To Her Honour the Honourable Salma Lakhani, AOE, BSc, LLD, the Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, His Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

Mr. Nenshi moved that the motion be amended by adding the following after "at the opening of the present session":

, and to inform Your Honour that the Legislative Assembly affirms that Alberta and the rest of Canada are stronger together, and denounces provincial separatism as extreme, divisive, and economically destructive.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment November 4: Mr. Gurtej Brar]

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has two minutes left to speak should the member choose to use those two minutes. No.

The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise and speak to the amendment that was made in his address to the reply to the throne speech by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. For those watching and listening, of course, as a reminder, the throne speech sets out the intent of the government for this legislative sitting. But it failed to address, I think, a key issue that is on many Albertans' minds, and I'm thankful to the Leader of the Official Opposition for tabling the following amendment, which said:

to inform Your Honour that the Legislative Assembly affirms that Alberta and . . . Canada are stronger together, and denounces provincial separatism as extreme, divisive, and economically destructive.

Mr. Speaker, I'm thrilled that the Leader of the Official Opposition tabled this amendment. It was very consistent with a motion that I also had hoped that this government would consider which really reflects the meaning and the feelings of Albertans across this province, which is that they are deeply disappointed that this government continues to elevate the rhetoric of separatism in this province, which is economically devastating for us as well, driving away investment and job creation, but doing that in such a way that is also reminding Albertans that they are overwhelmingly incredibly proud to be not just Albertans but to be Canadians. We saw that this summer. Almost half a million Albertans put their names to a petition denouncing separatism.

We know – we know on this side of the House, and it's shown over and over again – that the vast majority of Albertans are not just proud Albertans, but they are proud Canadians. They see the way this Premier has caved to the separatists in her party and elevated the discussion on the national and now international level. It's chasing away investment and driving away job creation from companies and investors who want certainty and stability for their dollars. They do not want chaos and pipe dreams. I'm very

interested, Mr. Speaker, in hearing members of the government speak to this very important amendment.

I'm also very interested in how they will vote. Here's what's important for everybody to know, Mr. Speaker. If the government members decide to take the wise counsel and advice of the members on this side of the House and vote in favour of this amendment – and I strongly encourage them to do so – it would mean that those MLAs are standing with the majority of their constituents. Let's be clear. There is no riding in this province where the majority of its constituents support separatism. This is an opportunity for government MLAs to do what their constituents are begging them to do: listen to them rather than follow the orders of the Premier or the separatists in their party or in their caucus.

It's true that voting in favour of this amendment would probably make things a little bit awkward for those UCP MLAs in their own caucus; it certainly would be divisive amongst them. But now more than ever I think many government MLAs have a lot of work to do to earn the support and trust of their constituents. I seem to recall that voting in line with your constituents' wishes is a good way to do that. However, if government MLAs vote no to this amendment, it means their loyalty is not to their constituents and is not to Alberta or to Canada; it is to party and leader first and always. I look forward to seeing government members speak in support of this amendment and to vote according to their conscience.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any more speakers on replies to the Speech from the Throne? Seeing none.

[The voice vote indicated that amendment A1 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the amendment:

Al-Guneid	Ellingson	Kayande
Arcand-Paul	Elmeligi	Metz
Batten	Eremenko	Miyashiro
Boparai	Ganley	Nenshi
Brar, Gurinder	Goehring	Pancholi
Brar, Gurtej	Gray	Sabir
Calahoo Stonehouse	Haji	Schmidt
Ceci	Hoffman	Shepherd
Chapman	Hoyle	Sweet
Dach	Ip	Tejada
Deol	Irwin	Wright, P.
Eggen	Kasawski	

Against the amendment:

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

Hunter	Rowswell	Yao
Jean	Sawhney	Yaseen
Johnson		
Totals:	For – 35	Against – 46

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:06 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

3:10

Against the motion:

Al-Guneid	Ellingson	Kayande
Arcand-Paul	Elmeligi	Metz
Batten	Eremenko	Miyashiro
Boparai	Ganley	Nenshi
Brar, Gurinder	Goehring	Pancholi
Brar, Gurtej	Gray	Sabir
Calahoo Stonehouse	Haji	Schmidt
Ceci	Hoffman	Shepherd
Chapman	Hoyle	Sweet
Dach	Ip	Tejada
Deol	Irwin	Wright, P.
Eggen	Kasawski	
Totals:	For – 46	Against – 35

[Motion carried]

Government Motions

Address in Reply to Speech from the Throne

12. Ms Smith moved:

Be it resolved that the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne be engrossed and presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor by such members of the Assembly as are members of Executive Council.

[Government Motion 12 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader. [interjection]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 5

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

Mr. Schow: Good to go, Mr. Speaker? Excellent. Well, thank you, and I thank all the members of the Assembly for their keen enthusiasm for the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. I rise to move second reading of the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2025.

As I've said before, this act is one to amend existing legislation, to make any possible corrections. Riveting stuff, Mr. Speaker. Very important that we move this, as we typically do at least once a year, to make sure we stay up to date with all the things that we're doing in this province. With that, I move second reading of Bill 5, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2025.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Government House Leader has moved second reading of Bill 5, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2025.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to stand and speak to Bill 5, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. Now, what we see in this bill is the government having to once again walk back an attempt to give themselves extraordinary new powers. What we saw previously – this is a pattern we've seen under this government, under two iterations of this party in government. I think that – pardon me.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Stephan: Settle down.

Mr. Shepherd: Pardon me. The Member for Red Deer-South could do well not to mock people when they are having a chronic health incident, Madam Speaker.

Now, what we saw under two iterations of this government is that they have repeatedly, again, attempted to give themselves extraordinary power. We saw this first during the pandemic with the introduction of Bill 10, under which this government awarded themselves the sweeping power to not only amend or add to any existing law but to write entirely new laws behind closed doors at the stroke of a pen without ever setting foot in the Legislature. They insisted, at that time, that was just a clarification of powers that they believed they already had.

Now, we introduced a number of amendments to curb that sweeping power. Each of those amendments was rejected at the time by the then Minister for Municipal Affairs, the Member for Calgary-Hays. However, after the government rushed through that legislation, rejected those amendments, they faced significant push-back from the community, indeed from members of their own political base. They were forced to call an entire special committee of the Legislature to review the entirety of the Public Health Act as a distraction while they walked back that colossal mistake.

Now, you'd think after all of that, they would learn their lesson, but no. With the arrival of a new leader, the current Premier, they introduced their sovereignty act in the Legislature, and right there, smack in the middle, was a section that once again would have granted the UCP cabinet new powers to bypass the Legislative Assembly and unilaterally amend provincial laws, precisely the same thing they had just walked back from Bill 10 in the Public Health Act. They, too, had to choose to walk that back. Now, that time, Madam Speaker, they did so before the legislation passed.

Now, in the time between we have certainly seen many instances, again, where this government gives their ministers and others extensive new powers to take extensive action, whether it's regulation or other pieces, with the stroke of a pen, moving more and more centralization of power into ministers' offices. That is what we saw them do again previously when they introduced two clauses last spring that allowed cabinet to rewrite virtually any privacy or information law in Alberta without legislative approval.

Now, what we have seen, Madam Speaker, is that Albertans really prefer that their laws are made through the proper legislative debate, not backroom cabinet decisions. I mean, our democracy really only functions the way it's meant to when laws receive full scrutiny by elected representatives that are answerable to the people. The fact that this was done on privacy and information law is important to note because we have seen repeated complaints about this government's abuse and skirting of freedom of information laws in this province to hide information from Albertans. Indeed, I don't think we have ever had a government so allergic to, so resistant to, so contemptuous of transparency and accountability.

Indeed, we saw shortly after this government was re-elected that there was an investigation that was launched by the Information and Privacy Commissioner, a two-year investigation of every government ministry, looking into allegations of abuse of freedom of information laws. That investigation found that the government had, in fact, intentionally implemented internal procedures and policies that allowed government employees to wrongfully deny freedom of information requests. This was their policy, Madam Speaker, to contravene the laws. Rather than actually addressing that issue or improving their processes, the government changed the laws. They changed how freedom of information works in this province to make it easier for them to hide the truth from Albertans and block Albertans' abilities to access key information.

In fact, what we have seen is this pattern repeated over and over, Madam Speaker. When members of the media attempted to access information about the surveys that this government conducted regarding an Alberta pension plan, this government resisted, fought, refused to follow the law for an extended period before finally breaking down and handing it over. But they did not learn their lesson. This is a government apparently drunk on power. What we found out this year is again when Alberta media put in a duly filed freedom of information request on information gathered at and surveys conducted for this government's Alberta Next town halls and website, the government again refused to provide it.

It went to mediation, and when the individual that was adjudicating in that case took a look at it, they said: "No. The government is wrong. They need to provide that information." They gave them a certain number of days to do it. When they reached the end of those numbers of days, the government just said, "Yeah, no," again flouting freedom of information laws in this province. This government has no respect for Albertans, Madam Speaker, no respect for transparency. It's no wonder they're enmeshed in the corrupt care scandal.

3:20

What we have here today in Bill 5 is a rare case. Well, it's actually not rare because, again – let's be clear – the government has had to walk back these kinds of attempts to grab sweeping power for itself before. But, certainly, in the current context, when we're talking about freedom of information, it's a rare case where the government is actually admitting a mistake and doing something about it.

What we have here in Bill 5, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, is the government walking back that piece they introduced, those

clauses to two of the acts that allow cabinet to rewrite virtually any privacy or information law in the province of Alberta without legislative approval. It's one moment, Madam Speaker, when this government actually found some moral principle, a bit of humility, and said: yeah, maybe we've gone too far.

You know, as we made clear when we were debating the original legislation last spring, we simply can't trust a government that is so embroiled in scandal and corruption to wield those kinds of overarching powers without proper oversight. Indeed, Madam Speaker, I'd say that even an ethical, competent government should not be allowed to override those kinds of powers.

Of course, that is not what we've seen from this government. We saw them bury these power-grabbing clauses in Bill 46 last spring, hoping nobody would catch those underhanded tactics. Much as they did under Bill 10 previously, when we moved amendments, again, to try to curb those powers, they rejected those amendments, voted them down. I mean, the contempt this government has for the democratic process, for the checks and balances that are duly put in place, our appointed officers of the Legislature, the elected opposition, pretty much anyone who stands in the way of them having just complete, unfettered power to simply do whatever they want: I think it's unmatched by any government that we've seen in this province before.

Frankly, these should never have been part of Alberta law in the first place. The government could have simply voted for these amendments last spring. Then we wouldn't need to be here today debating Bill 5, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, these portions of it, to clean up their mess. I mean, we've known since the beginning that these undemocratic clauses shouldn't have even been suggested. An Alberta New Democrat government, Madam Speaker, will not pursue this kind of sweeping power. We will have respect for the laws governing transparency and accountability in the province of Alberta.

Now, there are a number of other portions within Bill 5, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, and we don't have any particular concerns with those, but we felt it was important to note once again what the history and the repeated pattern of this government is as we continue to see the investigation of scandals, as we continue to see the exposure of further corruption, as this government attacks and undermines so many of the institutions and public services that Albertans depend on.

With that, I will conclude my debate at this stage of Bill 5. Thank you.

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

Seeing none, I will ask the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a second time]

Bill 4

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

[Adjourned debate November 17: Member Irwin]

The Deputy Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Metz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am really pleased today to have a chance to speak to Bill 4, the Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2). I want to speak to this from the perspective of: why are we spending all of this time, money, and effort focusing on something that Albertans do not want, which is a new police service, and completely ignoring the determinants of safety, which are the same as the determinants of health, where we could get a buy-in and

improve the lives of Albertans tremendously and get a two-for here, improve health and improve safety all at the same time?

It's been known for centuries that the social environment plays a huge role in terms of safety and crime. If we think of the very famous novel by Victor Hugo, he describes Jean Valjean, one of the main characters in that novel, who went to prison for 19 years of hard labour for stealing a loaf of bread because he was unemployed, there were no jobs, and he was trying to feed his sister and multiple family members. We have to pay attention to what the circumstances are and fix those so that we are preventing many of the problems around safety issues and, of course, health care at the same time.

Determinants of health and safety are all of the factors that influence how likely we are to stay healthy or become ill or injured or to be unsafe. There are the social determinants, biomedical risk factors, and behavioural risk factors, which all interact. Many of the key drivers of health and safety really reside in our everyday living and working conditions. These are the circumstances where we grow, we live, we work, we age. These social determinants include factors such as income. Appropriate minimum wage would probably do a lot more than buying more police. Education: having the lowest funding per student and pretending to care about class size and complexity and not including experts that are vital to understand these issues on your committee are going to play a huge role. Unemployment, high unemployment, cutting social supports: these are all things that will have a much better impact on improving the safety in our environment than building a brand new police force.

Social determinants can strengthen or undermine health and safety of individuals and of our communities. For example, people from poor social or economic circumstances are at greater risk of poor health outcomes and poor safety than the more advantaged people. A person's health and safety are influenced also by biomedical factors and health behaviours that are a big part of their individual lifestyle. These can be positive such as being vaccinated or negative such as consuming alcohol and other risk factors. Biomedical risk factors such as high blood pressure can have a direct impact on illness and chronic disease, and chronic disease impacts safety. Behavioural risk factors such as tobacco use, risky alcohol consumption, use of illicit drugs, not getting enough exercise, and poor eating patterns are also detrimental to health and to safety.

To be safe, we need a strong public health system and strong public health care. This will help manage this. We do not need an American-style health care system, which has far less safety and far worse health outcomes and far higher costs. We need to be paying attention to these determinants of health and safety instead of pouring money into things that are going to take us in the opposite direction.

There are some populations that are far more likely to suffer from this lack of attention to social determinants of health. In Alberta one of the key populations is our Indigenous population. We're going to buy more policemen, build a whole new system through this bill when, really, we need to be paying attention to the fact that Indigenous people have a life expectancy that is nine years less than the average Albertan. The risks of miscarriage are many times higher than that of average Albertans.

3:30

Our health is indeed influenced by the choices we make, but we need to have a strong public health system to guide people and give them the correct information rather than misinformation and pouring out conspiracy theories, as we repeatedly hear from this government. We need to focus on whether people are immunized,

allow them the resources to have a healthy diet and to undertake regular exercise. Health prevention and promotion and timely, effective treatment and care are important contributors to the health and safety of our population.

The broader social factors that influence health are a little bit less broadly recognized, but there is a very close relationship between living and working conditions and health outcomes that lead to a better understanding of how we can all be safer and healthier. None of this includes building a new police system. Factors such as income, education, conditions of employment – we need to assure safety measures in our workforce. The power that different groups have also impacts safety and health. The social supports that need to be there will strengthen and can undermine or help the health and safety of individuals and our communities. These have very potent effects. They're very much known as the social determinants of health, but now more known also as the determinants of safety.

The World Health Organization has described the social determinants as the circumstances in which people grow, live, work, and age, but also the systems that are put in place to deal with illness and everyday life. The conditions in which people live and die are shaped by political, social, and economic forces, and we need to be paying attention to this so that we have a healthy society. That means a safe society. The social conditions in which people are born, live, and work is the single most important determinant of good or ill health. It's also critical for safety. These include our behaviours as well as the biomedical factors. The framework includes our communities, and we realize that these are going to be different in different communities. We need to not be taking away the power of other levels of elected officials and the power of local communities around what their needs are so that people can get what they need.

Inequalities in health form a social gradient of health, and this also relates to safety. In general the higher a person's socioeconomic position the healthier they are and the safer they are. Some health inequities are attributable to external factors and to conditions outside the control of the individual. These inequities are avoidable and unjust, and we have to pay attention to them. Come back to poverty, as I mentioned: the driver of Jean Valjean stealing that loaf of bread and getting 19 years of hard labour for trying to help the very survival of his family.

Another factor is discrimination. Different people are up against different barriers that impact how hard it is for them to get ahead in life. We have to pay attention to these if we're going to have a just society and assure safety for everyone. Those living in the lowest socioeconomic areas, likely compared to those living in the highest, will have more chronic health conditions, worse health, and lower safety. Those living in the lowest socioeconomic areas also live for fewer years. We are missing all kinds of talent by not supporting everyone with what they need to grow and be part of a productive society. If we're only taking our talent pool from those that have more opportunity at the beginning, we're going to miss the next Einstein.

Mothers in the lowest socioeconomic areas are also 30 per cent more likely to have low birth weight babies than mothers in the highest socioeconomic areas. We have to pay attention to the health of everyone, including women during their pregnancies, and make it accessible. We have to make early childhood care accessible, and we need to make life more affordable for everyone. All of this is going to make life more safe as opposed to buying more police officers.

Dependent children living in the lowest socioeconomic areas are three to four times as likely to be exposed to tobacco smoke inside the home. We need public health. We need a strong public health system to help with that and to raise everyone up.

People in low socioeconomic resource households also spend less on medical and health care than other households. They simply don't have the money to spend. An example of that is in dental care, where we can see that in the higher socioeconomic households 28 per cent will have seen a dentist recently versus 12 per cent in the lower socioeconomic. This all goes to a sense of contributing, of being part of community, of not struggling on a day-to-day basis, and it makes all of us much more safe.

Of course, there's also corruption that can happen in all levels. We know that people can often be greedy, even when they're in the highest socioeconomic levels. Need I say more? There are lots of questions about that going on at this time.

Evidence gathered from ways in which social, economic, political, and cultural conditions can create health inequities have really led to a large number of stories and reports over the last two to three decades that focus around what we know we need to do to keep our population healthier and safer. We need to invest in early life circumstances, avoid social exclusion.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 4, the Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2). This bill once again demonstrates the same pattern that this government is not listening to Albertans, not listening to experts, and certainly not listening to the communities who will be most affected.

I wanted to start by actually bringing attention to my own riding. The people I'm hearing from, my constituents, the neighbourhoods I represent, and the local businesses in my riding are living with fear every single day. They are facing extortion threats. Their homes and businesses have been shot at. Families are terrified for their own safety and the safety of their loved ones. Madam Speaker, the Edmonton Police Service has held two separate town halls in my riding because the situation is so severe, yet the provincial government, the very government responsible for ensuring safety has still not announced a single meaningful program to help address this crisis.

3:40

I have written to the minister, Madam Speaker, and to this day there has been no concrete action and no real support from this UCP government. This is the reality that my constituents are living, and instead of addressing this urgent, immediate public safety need, this government is using Bill 4 to pursue a costly policing restructuring that nobody asked for, a provincial police force that nobody asked for at all.

Madam Speaker, Alberta's communities thrive when government listens to the people who live in them, when public safety decisions reflect local realities and communities' needs, but Bill 4 is yet another step in a six-year pattern from this UCP government. A pattern of forcing forward an unwanted, unnecessary, and incredibly expensive push toward creating a provincial police force.

Albertans have rejected this plan again and again. Rural Albertans have rejected it, municipal leaders have rejected it, policing experts have rejected it, and the government's own data confirms that Albertans want to keep the RCMP in this province. Yet despite overwhelming opposition, the government continues to push forward with this narrow-minded agenda. Bill 4 is the next chapter in the rollout that has been happening, quietly, sometimes, and continuously and deliberately at other times, in pieces. We have

seen Bill 11 in spring 2024, Bill 49 in spring 2025, and now Bill 4, again, in the House.

Each bill edges Alberta closer to a fully provincial police force, all while avoiding transparency about the cost, the consequences, and the lack of public support. This will grant the newly created Alberta Sheriffs Police Service, ASPS, powers equivalent to municipal police. It reclassifies sheriffs as police officers, changes their labour relations systems, aligns them with municipal police standards, and builds the legislative and structural foundation needed to replace the RCMP.

Madam Speaker, let me be absolutely clear. This is a costly experiment. There is no mandate for it. There is no clear cost breakdown from this government, and there's no evidence that it will improve the safety of anyone in this province. The government has not been transparent about the true cost of this project, but independent analysis shows \$1.386 billion to transition to a provincial police force and \$170 million every year lost in federal RCMP funding. That is more than \$1 billion in six years: major new spending on so many things, like vehicles, equipment, buildings, training, dispatch systems, IT, and more salary increases and retraining costs for converting sheriffs into full police officers. Government is doing this for what purpose? No answer. Maybe just to rebrand policing in Alberta. Nothing.

Madam Speaker, the National Police Federation said that, at best, Albertans want real solutions to real problems. They want affordability. They want health care. They want community safety. Rural Albertans deserve actual improvements, not political experiments, not symbolic moves, not restructuring that costs more and delivers much less.

The data is clear, Madam Speaker. Pollara Strategic Insights supported in October 2025, just last month, that 76 per cent of Albertans in RCMP-served communities are satisfied with their policing. Seventy-one per cent of them say that they have not been properly consulted for this. Eighty-one per cent believe there are far more important priorities than restructuring policing right now in this province. Replacing the RCMP ranks, oh, the second from the bottom in their priorities.

Rural Municipalities of Alberta have said repeatedly that they were not consulted, not informed, not respected even. They warn that the government is creating new policing structures without public input. Bill 4 continues precisely that behaviour.

Municipal leaders are raising alarms, experts are raising alarms, and Albertans in majority are raising alarms. The only people who seem to be satisfied with this direction are sitting on the government benches. They refuse to listen to anyone else.

Madam Speaker, I also want to be very clear on Alberta's New Democrats' position. We fully support improvements to Clare's law. We support enhanced information sharing, improved threat assessment tools, and stronger protections for those at risk of domestic violence. Bill 4 improperly ties these good, important improvements to a deeply unpopular agenda, restructuring policing. That is poor governance. That is partisan gamesmanship with domestic violence legislation, and that is something that should be completely unacceptable in this Chamber. If this government was serious about protecting people at risk, they had options. They would have introduced the Clare's law amendment as a stand-alone bill, but they didn't. That speaks volumes as to the intentions of this government behind this bill.

What we should be doing instead – if this government truly wanted to improve public safety, they would invest in what communities actually need: more front-line policing resources, more women's shelters, crime prevention programs, mental health supports, addiction treatments, community safety partnership. That

is exactly what Albertans have been asking for. Every one of these investments produces a far greater impact than a costly, unproven policing overhaul. Instead, the government continues chasing the expensive political project, one that Albertans have rejected over and over and over again.

Bill 4 is not a simple administrative amendment; it is a major step towards a full provincial police force, and it's being advanced without any transparency, without any public support, without clear costs, without any mandate, and without answering the questions that rural communities have been asking for 18 months.

3:50

Cathy Heron, mayor of St. Albert, speaking about the Alberta Next Panel and policing to St. Albert *Gazette* said,

"The general theme for everything is 'No more oversight from Ottawa we want to do this all ourselves.' Well I completely disagree, especially with policing." [She added] that St. Albert chooses to remain with the RCMP for a number of reasons, and one of them being that they get money from the federal government to offset the contract cost.

She said that transitioning from the RCMP to a provincial police force would likely give the City no increase in any kind of say than it gets with Ottawa right now.

"We have a good interaction with the RCMP here."

That's what she said.

"We do get our individual issues expressed at the table. I have no guarantee that would happen at the provincial level," she said.

"It's just trading one master for another."

Madam Speaker, that is exactly what Bill 4 represents, replacing a policing system that works with one that will cost more and deliver less. This government insists that this is what Albertans want, but their own consultations, their own polling, their own community feedback say the opposite. Albertans want affordability, not costly experiments. They want health care, not political rebranding. They want real safety, not expensive bureaucracy. They trust the RCMP and do not want a provincial police force at all.

Albertans deserve a government willing to listen to them. Bill 4 is unnecessary. Bill 4 is expensive. Bill 4 is completely out of touch with the needs and priorities of Albertans. It forces together unrelated issues, domestic violence legislation and a massive policing overhaul, in a way that is irresponsible and deeply disrespectful.

There are so many other issues we have to work on. We can spend this money that the government is trying to waste on creating the Alberta police services on the province. Like, they have the lowest minimum wage in the country, and Alberta is actually facing the second-highest or the highest unemployment rate in the country. There are so many different priorities we can work on that Albertans are asking for every single day, and this bill is totally going in the opposite direction. For that reason, Madam Speaker, I oppose Bill 4.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would say that it's a pleasure to rise to speak to this bill except for the fact that I feel like I've been speaking to this bill for five years. I'm not quite sure why I'm here again in the sense of: this seems to be a repetitive pattern by this government to say one thing while they're doing another thing while they're deteriorating services over here and while they're deciding to try to redirect, I would say, or distract from issues that are actually happening in real life to Albertans that they actually care about.

The reason that I say this is that I think it's time that we go down a little bit of the memory lane on this piece of legislation and why we're here. I'm sure many remember that the government had decided that they no longer wanted the RCMP, that we all of a sudden needed a new police force. There were a lot of questions as to: but why? Why all of a sudden is the Premier at the time so fascinated with needing to get rid of the RCMP? Well, let's think about that for a second. What was going on around 2019, 2020? Does anybody remember what was happening? I do. The Premier of the time was currently under investigation by the RCMP for somehow being involved in what was perceived to be some form of election interference, nothing really new to this government.

While that was all happening, all of a sudden this conversation started: "Well, you know what? The RCMP aren't actually doing their jobs, and we need to be concerned about their ability to respond to rural Albertans and respond to this and all of these things." So the government decided to move ahead on wanting to have a little bit more control over policing in the province, who got to do investigations, what kind of investigations would those be. The reality of it is that between 2020 and now when people start doing things that the government doesn't like, they seem to be moved out of their positions.

But you can't do that with the RCMP because they're not just reporting to the province; they are reporting to the federal government. There is actual legislation and rules and regulations that are consistent across Canada that the RCMP must abide by, so you don't have the same abilities to move or shuffle people out of positions when they become inconvenient. We do seem to see this government do that often. We see this government do this with ethics commissioners. We've seen them do it with Auditors General. We've seen them do it with — oh, my goodness, there's got to be more. I feel like there might have been an announcement today. I feel like there's been a lot of shuffling of people when the government just doesn't happen to like what they do.

We also see this when Albertans say things that the government doesn't like. You know, teachers go on strike: notwithstanding clause. "We don't agree with you. It's time for you to go. We're going to take away that right. Oh, you happen to be a child that needs medical treatment for hormones? We don't really agree with that. We're going to take that right away." It's a thing that this government really likes to do. If they don't agree with you, they move you along or they replace you with somebody else. That's the history of how we got here with the RCMP.

It's also the history of this government never ever deciding that they have to listen to anything that Albertans actually say because if they were, this piece of legislation wouldn't be here. The reason that I say that is that if you literally go on to the alberta.ca website right now, the government is doing a review on the PFM model, which is the police funding model which, to be clear, expired last year. This province isn't even funding policing right now in partnership with municipalities. They're just renegotiating and trying to figure out the model.

I should be clear. They extended it but not to the level that municipalities have asked for. They've been asking for way more support. They've been asking for way more policing, and that can be done under this model. But, of course, in true government style, they extend it by a year and they slowly cut funding off and they don't improve the funding model, so then their answer to, "Why we can't get services out fast enough?" is, "Well, it's because they're not responding." Well, they're not responding because the government is not even supporting municipalities to fund them properly, which is what municipalities have been asking them for to the point now where we see that the government decided to do a

consultation on the funding model because it expired in March 2024, so almost a year ago.

This blows my mind. I can't get over the inadequacy of our current government. The consultation with municipalities and communities started in May 2025. I'm not even going to count how many months that is. It's many, many too many. It ended in June 2025. We are now what month? November. Currently it literally says that it's still open, not even under review. Results are not under review. The consultation is still open with the hope that there will be an updated police funding model meeting for 2026 at some point. Okay.

4:00

Yet this government is like: "Woe is us. We can't get any money. We're not getting enough money from the feds, and we can't get enough supports into communities because of the funding model, and there aren't enough people being hired." Well, probably because the feds don't even know what the province is doing because they haven't even figured out their funding model with the municipalities yet. Like, sit down and have a conversation. This ongoing consultation stuff that this government tries to do to deflect from their lack of ability to do their jobs blows my mind. Let's just create another blue-ribbon panel or another consultation group or a whatever.

The municipalities have been very clear. RMA has been talking about the RCMP and the need for more additional funding from the province for years. They've also been saying that they don't want to get rid of the RCMP and that they want to keep the RCMP. So I think the consultation is done. Municipalities say: "No. Government, we don't want what you're offering. We want to keep what we have, and we want you to fund it adequately so that our citizens have the response and the support that they need." It's not that hard.

To be clear, the government will fudge their numbers and say that it's taking 45 minutes to respond to a call. That's not true. It's a 95 per cent on average two-minute response by the RCMP to a call. I don't get where the government keeps coming up with this stuff.

I also feel like there needs to be some openness and transparency about some of the decisions that are being made like: why does this bill include Clare's Law? Why is it being brought into what we're talking about, creating a new police service? They are two different things. Very, very different things. One is about domestic violence, which is not being funded appropriately in this province. It's about victim services, also not being funded appropriately in this province. It's about providing wraparound services, also not happening in this province. Like, I could just go on to all of the things.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

This government continues to cut funding to everything and then goes: "Why is crime increasing so much? We have a community and safety issue; therefore, we must become draconian and, like, create these police forces." Yet if you funded housing and you funded education and you funded health care and we had wraparound services and we were able to address mental health and addictions and we were able to just take care of our neighbours like we should, did you know that crime would just naturally decrease because people's needs would be met? It's the social determinants of health. It's the basis of humanity. It's what we used to do.

This government has been standing up in this House this week – again, I just can't even comprehend what's happening – talking about their increased funding for food banks as if that's a success story. When community members and neighbours have to go to the food bank, we are failing as a community to provide the basic

services to our neighbours. Like, we talk about wanting to increase minimum wage so that people can actually afford the groceries at the grocery store. The government says no and then says: but don't worry, we have a food bank. Those two do not correlate and they don't answer the question.

How about we start with supporting our community and our neighbours so that we can naturally decrease crime so that people do not have to resort to petty theft or any of those things? We also know that domestic violence increases when there are stressors in the home, which are usually related to income and lack of housing, which also can contribute to mental health and addiction issues.

Everything in this bill can easily be solved by, instead of spending \$1.8 billion on creating a new police force, just providing the basics for Albertans' needs; \$1.8 billion is a lot of money. Also, \$1.7 billion I believe is the dollar amount that we're going to lose from federal transfers that will now have to be covered by the provincial coffers; \$1.7 billion I believe over six years that will no longer be received by the province, somewhere around there. We're up into almost \$3 billion between how much it's going to cost us to build infrastructure and respond and then also what's going to get lost in federal transfers. That's a lot of housing. That's a lot of health care services. That is a variety of many things that would help address the stressors that many Albertans are facing.

My question is: why? Why does this government continuously keep doing things that are opposite from what Albertans are saying they need? Like, we are literally here right now debating legislation that does not meet a single need for Albertans. None of this has. I haven't seen a single piece of legislation introduced in this Chamber since I've been here for the last few weeks that doesn't either remove the human rights of Albertans or spend Albertans' money doing something they're not asking for.

Where are we at about dealing with the issues? Oh, here's an education bill. That's great. But, oh, it's not actually dealing with the stressors in classrooms; it's creating more. It's not funding classrooms; it's just making classrooms more complex. It's not funding health care; we don't even have a health care bill. Like, we have a bill on water, we have a bill on the police services, and then so far the pieces of legislation that the government seems to be most proud of are the ones that remove human rights. It is an absolute embarrassment, I would say.

I would be terrified to sit on that side of the House in government right now. I would be embarrassed to be in government right now. How can you walk out of here three or four weeks before Christmas and be like: I just took away the human rights of two groups in this province. Two groups. Remove the rights of two groups of Albertans in this province, human rights, fundamental human rights, and then be like: but we need to get tough on crime. The disconnect between the responsibility of government to govern on behalf of the people has been lost by this government, absolutely lost. When the power becomes so entrenched in the psyche of the individuals sitting on the government side that they celebrate taking away human rights from individuals and think that that is governance means the government has lost the plot. Two groups. Like, I just cannot understand.

Then the audacity of the language that we hear members of the government use when they talk about Albertans speaks to the absolute disregard that they have for the very people that live in this province. The government has lost that Albertans used to be the people that would show up at their neighbour's house and take care of them. It didn't matter who you were and where you came from. If you needed something, we would show up and take care of you.

Now every single budget funding cut comes out of the very services that Albertans need, and now we're going to start putting a marker on licences to deny even the basic services to the people that

have come from away. To hear that Albertans come first and then if you are from away, you come second speaks volumes about how this government sees the very people that live here. It's an embarrassment, and they should all really reconsider why they're sitting in those chairs and maybe just stand up and fight for the very people that you represent.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to speak to the bill? The Member for Calgary-Acadia – or Klein. Calgary-Klein. Sorry.

Member Tejada: We look so much alike.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise and speak on Bill 4, the Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2). To echo the words of my colleague from Edmonton-Manning, it feels a little bit like *Groundhog Day* around here. We just keep inching towards an Alberta provincial police force, which, you know, I guess at this stage of the game is really unsurprising. We have seen that this government has shown that it will ignore public feedback on the Alberta police force. They will vilify the bodies that they would like to in order to achieve their aims. I've heard so much negative messaging around the RCMP.

4:10

I ask myself: who is this for, who was consulted, and why are they going ahead with this bill? I know that they held a series of Alberta Next panels, which, in the fashion of the UCP, is holding panels with predetermined outcomes and very limited multiple-choice feedback options. I know that I've been copied on so many e-mails from constituents. I just took a look before I got up to speak to this bill and was able to see that there are literally hundreds of e-mails that have come into our office, perhaps thousands if we look at the last two years.

Even before the election in 2023 this was something that I was hearing about at the doors, the ridiculousness of a notion that we should adopt a provincial police force. You know, the name of the bill is innocuous enough, but I feel like there is so much that is missed in this bill, and although we've come back to this pond multiple times, I am not seeing anything that I as an MLA have been hearing from my constituents, that we've heard from folks in rural communities. Their needs are not being served. I know the title of one of the e-mails was that Albertans have spoken loudly and clearly.

And they've been calling. Alberta has literally been calling all of our offices, and this government has refused to pick up.

Dr. Elmeligi: But we do.

Member Tejada: What's that?

Dr. Elmeligi: We do.

Member Tejada: Yes, we do, and we call them back and have wonderful conversations with, hopefully, a lack of awkward moments.

Member Irwin: No expletives.

Member Tejada: Yeah. No expletives. That's true, although I've listened to a few coming out in descriptions of what is being done right now with our province and how Albertans' priorities are being ignored.

Speaking of listening, I can say without a shadow of a doubt that there is a complete lack of listening, a complete ignoring of what people's priorities are. People have told me that this government has lost all credibility when it comes to public safety. Public safety is an issue that we all deal with, right? No matter what constituency

you're in in this province, it is a priority. It can be a priority in rural communities; it's a priority in municipalities. I see that the moves that this government is making consistently ignore the voices of real Albertans and just forge ahead with a predetermined agenda that is set by this government with legislation that no one asked for and actually people have loudly rejected.

What we are speaking to in this bill is that we are asking the government to take a pause and to listen to the communities that it claims to represent and what their needs are locally and come up with some real public safety solutions. I know that my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre has done some excellent work in many consultations and come up with a tool kit around public safety that I think definitely he should be proud of and that I know we as a New Democrat caucus are definitely proud of.

We know from some of the e-mails that we're copied on from rural communities that they feel that they're not being represented by this government. They're begging for genuine solutions to safety concerns and not expensive bureaucratic experiments, and what I see as a repetitive trend with this government is that there's a lot of experimenting, not a lot of consultation, and it's usually pretty expensive, you know, for a government that prides itself on fiscal conservatism. I mean, I want to laugh even just saying that because it just does not exist with this government. They're spending like mad and not on anything that people need.

They've continued this policing project without a public mandate, without a detailed cost breakdown, and without any evidence that would actually enhance safety. They've opted out of any honesty with Albertans and have been so focused with this expensive policing rebrand while refusing to face the issues that we hear about every day in our offices and that we take seriously. Those issues are, of course, the big three right now: affordability, jobs, and health care.

Speaking of affordability, there have been a number of opportunities in this House for this government to reach across the aisle and look at some good solutions that have been proposed to solve issues of affordability. One was the minimum wage bill. There have been several also proposed around housing – and, of course, just the idea that we're mid-term and all of the promises that were made about protecting public health care have basically vanished. It's just completely shameless moves to privatize our health care and without any results. I see that we are going down a similar path with this bill.

Now, to speak to what this is being spent on and what I would like to see it spent on. In terms of critical services it would be front-line policing resources, crime prevention programs – that can be so broad – mental health support, addiction treatment, community safety initiatives.

That brings me to the idea of prevention. I know that there was some talk from the other side around preventative measures when it comes to health care, and I see that there are so many opportunities. We've come back to this bill about policing so many times, and it's not just about policing. Public safety is not just about policing. I echo some of the words from my colleague from Calgary-Varsity when talking about the social determinants of health. We think about the social conditions that can lead to some of the biggest problems we face in this province, one of them being violence; gender-based violence, right?

This kind of segues into the talk about Clare's law. Of course, as Alberta's New Democrats, we support any improvements to Clare's law. Bill 4 ties improvements to Clare's law to this very unpopular Alberta provincial police force. I'm not sure what the motivation behind that is. I can think of so much work that has to be done around gender-based violence that this government refuses to address, and I would offer that in addition to Clare's law – first of

all I would love to see Clare's law not only as a stand-alone bill but for us to address the issues of gender-based violence, violence against children and to have that be its own bill.

There are so many organizations that are doing important work when it comes to preventive measures. I can think of just a few in the city of Calgary, people who are addressing not only shelters, which have been underfunded and have been struggling, but community programming that addresses the root causes and looks at the family as a whole. I've been so impressed with some of the work that's done by some of the organizations in Calgary, where they address not just the women seeking services and seeking shelter but the men that are part of that family unit and the help that they might need in learning healthy patterns in a relationship.

4:20

I see this refusal to address those issues, which actually could have an impact on even the number of police calls we're seeing. Also, police calls aren't the only measure of whether or not you are successful in addressing gender-based violence. I know that I saw that in budget estimates, that the criteria to measure our success around preventing gender-based violence and violence against 2SLGBTQIA folks – you know, this government has now quite openly disregarded that community's safety. We've seen it with the actions that they took just today. They could be doing more on shelters. They could be doing more on prevention. They could tie that to Clare's law. Those are things that exist in all communities that they could be investing money in. Instead, they are focused on the sheriff's police force.

There's another area around not just preventing violence but what was done with victims' services. I will say that I worked in a constituency office at the time and spoke with folks in various victims' services units that were across the province, that were in those rural areas. You know, now victims are struggling to get the funding that they need, to get the support that they need, and that all started with this government.

I would love to see them prioritize work on what Albertans are asking for and listening to Albertans when they tell them that we do not need to take more steps towards an Alberta provincial police force. That is why I recommend that every member of this House vote against Bill 4.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any others? The Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sorry, my device is about to die. I'm ready. I'm okay.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to, yet again, speak to how we don't need a provincial police force. I feel like I could have just recycled all of the times I spoke about this before. But that's okay. I made whole new notes today [interjections] – I know – starting from scratch although some of the messages are the same. I guess the first message is that I oppose this bill. Albertans don't want a provincial police force. Please see previous debates on said topic.

I think what I find most interesting is that, like my colleagues have said, it does feel a little like Groundhog Day over here, Mr. Speaker. Here we go again. Let's talk about a provincial police force. It's very clear that the government is not listening to Albertans because when I look through my inbox at e-mails about policing and the RCMP, most e-mails or pretty much all e-mails that I receive are saying: we don't need a provincial police force; please don't do this. I guess the government is not hearing those e-mails. That's okay. It's my job to represent my constituents, and I'm more than happy to do that. So one more time for the people in

the back: Albertans don't want a provincial police force. But here we are.

This bill is another step forward in establishing an Alberta provincial police force. It's really forcing through massive restructuring that Albertans have repeatedly rejected over time. The government does not have a public mandate for this. It was not part of what they ran on in the election. I think part of what is really upsetting my constituents is that this whole idea of a provincial police force just feels like another move to further separate Alberta from the federal government or from Ottawa. It really just feels like it's feeding that whole separatism rhetoric, which we have also demonstrated and Albertans have demonstrated that they do not support. So why do we keep talking about it?

The Alberta Next town halls that happened this summer, Mr. Speaker, were used as, the government did say, broad consultation with the public. Of course, the idea of an Alberta provincial police force and getting rid of the RCMP was discussed at the Alberta Next town halls. But I really want to talk a little bit about the experience that some of my constituents had at an Alberta Next town hall.

I had constituents who went to be part of the conversation and to participate in the conversation and who described to me a process that was not only unfair but actually generated fear and discomfort in people who opposed what was being discussed. My constituents who attended Alberta town halls did not raise their hand to participate in the discussion because they were afraid that they would be admonished or spoken over or verbally abused for speaking against ideas of the government.

That is not public consultation, Mr. Speaker. That is filling the room with people who agree with you and making sure that anybody who disagrees with you doesn't feel comfortable to share their voice. It's not only not public consultation; it's barely democracy. We do not have the privilege in this House to only listen to the people who agree with us. That's not how democracy works. We are all democratically elected. Not a single person in this House got 100 per cent of the vote; therefore – I've said it before and I'll say it again – we are all responsible to represent people who did not vote for us. It is our duty to listen to everyone in our ridings and in our constituencies who reach out to us to share concerns. We don't have to agree with them, but we do need to listen to them.

An Alberta Next town hall that favours certain opinions over others or certain constituents over others is not public consultation; it is a UCP rally event. Two very different things. Public consultation should be designed to be equitable and adequate and meaningful. People should be invited to participate in multiple ways, depending on their preference. They need to see that their input is reflected in the conversation that happens next.

We know that Albertans are opposed to a provincial police force. I've got numbers coming later. We know that Albertans don't want this. We know that the Alberta Next town halls were not an equitable participation opportunity for people in Alberta, that they were very one-sided. When my constituents come to me and say that they tried to participate in a formal consultation process – consultation in quotes for *Hansard*, by the way – and they were not free to speak or share their opinion without fear of being chastised by the crowd, that is not consultation. That to me is kind of sad. I think it's sad if people don't feel like they can participate.

This government has proven time and time again, Mr. Speaker, that they're not super great at doing public consultation. Not only are people who disagree not really invited to share their opinions in an equitable way; oftentimes any online surveys or any conversation is highly slanted towards the government's opinion on something. So the question is never "How do you feel about a provincial police force?" or "How do you feel about an Alberta pension?" It's: "How much do you like a provincial police force?"

A lot or a lot a lot? How much do you like an Alberta pension? A little, a lot, or, like, I love it?" There's no opportunity for Albertans to say that they don't like it or that they don't want it. There's no opportunity for Albertans to disagree.

A good consultation asks open-ended questions, Mr. Speaker. It doesn't shut down dissenters, and that is not what has happened here. This government is more focused on expensive creation of something new, a provincial police force which will cost over a billion dollars to set up, rather than expanding something that already exists. I do not understand why this government needs to reinvent the wheel every five minutes. We have an Alberta sheriffs branch. They're the largest sheriffs service in Canada, and they are responsible for six specific branches of public safety: court security and prisoner transport, protection and communication services, investigation and surveillance, highway patrol, fish and wildlife enforcement, fugitive apprehension, sheriffs support. We spend about \$136 million a year on the Alberta sheriffs.

4:30

I want to just speak to that a little bit. In particular, I want to speak to the sheriffs highway patrol branch. When I go to rural communities in my riding, when I talk to rural councillors, when I talk to volunteers for rural crime watch, what I hear is that they wish rural crime watch was better funded, but I have yet to see any follow-through on that. I brought that up several times. That's a bit of a bummer. It's kind of an existing program that could use additional supports to increase public safety in rural spaces, but it doesn't happen. And I'm amazed, Mr. Speaker, because all the MLAs on the other side of the aisle represent rural ridings, yet none of them are standing up representing public safety in rural ridings. What's going on there?

When I meet with rural Albertans, what they tell me is that they want support for rural crime watch. But the other thing, Mr. Speaker, is that when I ask them what is one of the biggest public safety concerns they have, it is speeding on secondary highways. So instead of addressing speeding on secondary highways, this government throws out random consultation to increase speed limits on divided highways. I feel like I'm living in the Upside Down. People want one thing, and the government's like: "What? I'll do the opposite of that. Yeah. Cool." This is the world that we're living in here. People want rights. They're like: "No, no, no, no rights for everybody. We're going to do the opposite of that. You want to decrease speed limits? You want more enforcement for speeding? No, no; let's have a conversation about increasing speed limits." Get out of here. Why don't we have a conversation about serving Albertans? How about that? That'd be great.

If we already have an existing system in the Alberta sheriffs, why don't we just increase capacity of the Alberta sheriffs to better monitor speed on secondary highways? I've got secondary highways going through my riding, Mr. Speaker, where people are literally moving herds of cows across the road, and they have to deal with people in Porsches and Lamborghinis driving 200 kilometres an hour. I've got farmers in my riding who have witnessed significant vehicle fatalities because of speeding.

The RCMP does a great job serving the communities in my riding. When their capacity is limited, it is because they are trying to enforce speeding. The Alberta sheriffs could do that work. We could expand the sheriffs and expand their capacity to enforce speeding, and that would make a tremendous difference on rural safety. The fact that that's not even part of the conversation, Mr. Speaker, really leads me to think that public safety is not actually the intention here. It's not rural safety, it's not public safety in rural spaces, because if it were, we would have other options on the table.

Speaking of which, the sheriffs are also responsible for fish and wildlife enforcement services. Fish and wildlife used to be

responsible for responding to a lot of human-wildlife conflict related issues. Now that they've been kind of amalgamated with the sheriffs, they respond to all kinds of public safety related issues: domestic disputes, traffic accidents, vandalism, almost anything you can think of that happens in the rural space. But what does that mean, Mr. Speaker? Well, that means that there are fewer qualified, experienced fish and wildlife officers available to respond to human-wildlife incidents. And what does that mean? Over time people become more afraid of things like grizzly bears and cougars because fish and wildlife are not there to work with them to coexist with wildlife. Then what's this government's solution? Shoot it. Like, I am so tired of this government not actually seeing how things piece together on the landscape to serve Albertans, to coexist with wildlife and live in safer communities and safer spaces in the rural areas of this province. This bill is the next step to developing a provincial police force that isn't wanted.

In preparation for today I also reached out to emergency services of the Stoney First Nation, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured and blessed to have two First Nations in my riding, and of course First Nations have their own policing requirements. The Tsuut'ina First Nation has the Tsuut'ina police force, but the Stoney First Nation does not have their own police force.

This is an example of, actually, one community in my riding that would love to have their own police force. They don't want a provincial police force. They want a Stoney police force because it's really important to have Indigenous-led police forces on-reserve. There are a lot of cultural implications there that are not really being addressed by other police forces. The Stoney First Nation would love to have a Stoney police force for their communities, and they asked the government for support in drafting a business case to present to the federal government. What did this government say, Mr. Speaker? Sorry; we can't help you with that.

In the one case, in the one series of communities that I have that actually want a more independent police force, this government isn't willing to help them because they're an Indigenous community, and, oh, that's a federal problem, Mr. Speaker. It's so easy for this government to say, "That's a federal problem" when they don't want to deal with it, but the rest of the time they're like, "We don't want to deal with the feds; we want the feds to get out of our business," except for in this case, or in this case, or over here doing this thing. The hypocrisy astounds.

It was suggested to the Stoney First Nation that they consider adopting a regional approach to policing and maybe they could partner with the Tsuut'ina First Nation in a police force. Mr. Speaker, the fact that that was even suggested as a viable alternative demonstrates how little this government knows and understands First Nations on the Alberta landscape. The Tsuut'ina do not even speak the same language as the Stoney First Nation. You cannot have a police force that operates on Tsuut'ina and on Stoney reserves. They are not the same. They are two different nations. Well, actually, four different nations, because the Stoney is three nations itself.

This government needs to recognize the autonomy and the independence and the need for First Nations to be recognized as the nations that they are. The idea that they should combine police forces: I found that insulting, and I'm not even Indigenous. There is a lack of clarity for the Stoney Nation on how they can get individual policing on their reserve. This bill does not do that.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others wishing to speak? I will recognize the Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to make sure no one else wanted a chance to get up and speak on Bill 4. [interjection] All right. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, I sometimes reflect on this government and decisions they make. I'm going to go back in history to the time when they were children. They must have got a lot of gold stars any time they were asked by their mom to move the furniture around the living room. It was getting a little worn out, maybe it needed some investment, but then they moved the furniture around and mom said, "Good job," and they've carried that all the way into government, where we get gold stars for taking the health ministries, reshuffling that into four health ministries. Did they fund more health care? Nope. No, they did not. Did they make health care better? No, they did not, but they moved it into four. A good pat on the back for doing that.

Then we look at licence plates. Licence plates are doing an okay job. Let's create new licence plates, a new brand on the licence plates. A gold star, a pat on the back. I feel good about that, and I know I'm doing good service to Albertans.

Police officers: new uniforms. That will make things safer in Alberta, so let's get to work on that. That's what I get the positive feedback on: when I put new uniforms on, when I create new licence plates, when I create four health ministries.

Mr. Eggen: Deck chairs.

Mr. Kasawski: Deck chairs on the *Titanic* is the expression that's come up.

Today, Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on Bill 4, the Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2), a bill that on the surface claims to bring clarity and co-ordination but in practice raises serious concerns about priorities, oversight, and the direction this government is taking with public safety in Alberta.

4:40

I want to frame this discussion from the grounded, local perspective of the people of Sherwood Park and Strathcona county, who know a thing or two about working across jurisdictions, building trust, and delivering real community safety. Strathcona county has one of the most collaborative, well-functioning policing enforcement ecosystems in the province. We have the RCMP, we have municipal enforcement, we have community peace officers, and they work together every single day in a model that prioritizes practicality, communication, and the safety of families and businesses. The people of Strathcona county don't want ideological experiments. They want what works. Bill 4, unfortunately, moves us in a direction that creates uncertainty, downloads responsibility without resources, and chips away at a system already delivering results for Albertans.

Public safety starts with strengthening what works, not replacing it. Mr. Speaker, the government has continued to signal an interest in a provincial police force, circling the issue again and again without ever giving Albertans a straight answer. As we heard, this bill is number 2 on this, and Albertans have been clear: they don't want a provincial police force. It was clear at the doors in 2023. As soon as the Premier said, "We're not talking about a provincial police force," people's attitudes changed towards the UCP. But now that they're in government, it's back on the table, over and over again.

Municipalities don't want it. Rural counties don't want it. Indigenous communities don't want it. Strathcona county absolutely does not want it. Why? Because the cost is enormous, the disruption is risky, and it would force us to rearrange the resources we already rely on just to chase a political project nobody

asked for. Expected costs of a provincial police force: even the government's own commissioned studies show staggering numbers. The PricewaterhouseCoopers report estimated transition between \$366 million and \$1.2 billion, depending on the model.

When the government talks about relative priorities, and we say, "Could you direct more resources towards education in this province?" They say that there is no more money. We cannot. Yet they want to talk about something that might cost up to \$1.2 billion. Annual operating costs were estimated by the same study at \$734 million compared to the RCMP model, which costs approximately \$500 million after federal contributions. They want to give up federal money.

Municipalities warn that they would be forced to take on additional taxation just to maintain existing service levels during the transition. There is a lot of chatter in this House from the members for Grande Prairie. The experiment is costing the provincial taxpayers money to transition their police force, and they want to spread that cost writ large across this province. And the people of Strathcona county have said very clearly that they do not want this. They are not interested. Their numbers are optimistic, the ones that are draining the coffers of so much money potentially. It could be far worse.

Every independent analysis from municipalities, from policing experts, from the Rural Municipalities of Alberta, and from the Alberta Municipalities association, all warn the same thing: a provincial police force will cost Albertans more and deliver less. Mr. Speaker, when the Alberta New Democrats talk about responsible public safety, we mean putting money into the people and systems that already exist. Keep Albertans safe, but do not put us into a billion-dollar structural overhaul that nobody needs.

Bill 4 is looking at a download of responsibilities. It makes a series of amendments across several public safety statutes, but the pattern is clear: more costs for municipalities, Indigenous communities, and policing partners without the necessary funding or staffing to make it work. Strathcona county is an excellent example of what happens when the province works with municipalities. Our RCMP detachment collaborates closely with sheriffs highway patrol, community peace officers, and specialized enforcement units. It is an integrated, well-co-ordinated, and efficient system, but that system depends on stable roles, stable funding, and clear mandates. Bill 4 is introducing ambiguity. It opens the door to shifting priorities, and it foreshadows a future where the province expects local governments to pick up the slack created by provincial restructuring. This is the opposite of what community safety needs.

Commercial vehicle enforcement: a critically overlooked responsibility. Now, Mr. Speaker, one of the clearest examples of misplaced priorities in this government's public safety agenda is the underresourcing of commercial vehicle inspections in Alberta. It's not a flashy topic, but it's one of the most essential public safety functions we have. The people who ensure that transport trucks are safe, the cargo is secured, and brakes aren't failing on our highways are sheriff highway patrol officers working under the Solicitor General.

The facts matter here. Commercial vehicle inspection data: in 2022 Alberta completed more than 27,000 commercial carrier inspections, just a sample of the commercial vehicles on the road in Alberta. Of those inspections, 22 per cent resulted in out of service orders, meaning that those trucks were not safe to be on the road. Brake defects, steering failures, unsecured loads: these are the types of issues caught through routine, well-staffed inspection programs. According to Transportation and Economic Corridors data, fatal collisions involving heavy commercial vehicles have increased in recent years, highlighting the importance of consistent enforcement.

Every expert in highway safety says the same thing: expanding commercial vehicle inspections saves lives, but that requires people, actual boots on the ground doing the work. Instead of funding more inspection officers, increasing training opportunities, and giving sheriffs the operational stability they need, this government keeps diverting attention and resources to the idea of building a provincial police force.

Mr. Speaker, this is what happens when the government gets distracted by an unnecessary, politically motivated policing experiment. Other critical public safety roles fall behind with indecision paralysis created by a UCP government that is creating a constant state of uncertainty in our province. When sheriffs are pulled into duties they were never designed to handle or when funding is frozen because the province is trying to shuffle money toward a hypothetical police transition, fewer unsafe trucks get inspected. That means more risk for families driving beside those trucks on the Anthony Henday, on highway 16, on highway 21, around Sherwood Park. A better use of government resources and a more responsible public safety strategy would be to support sheriffs to do the job they are trained to do, which includes commercial carrier enforcement, checkpoints, motor vehicle safety, high-visibility traffic operations, joint operations with RCMP detachments. This is not complicated. It's a simple matter of focusing on priorities. It is a simple matter of focusing on Albertans' priorities.

Strathcona county's collaborative model should be the blueprint, not the exception. The government keeps pointing to public safety as its top concern. Well, if the government wants a model of what actually works, they should look at Strathcona county because in Strathcona county RCMP and enforcement services share information seamlessly. Peace officers have defined authorities and work within clear scopes, joint tasks happening daily, not just during crisis. The community sees one integrated public safety system, not competing agencies. The municipality has invested heavily in prevention, traffic safety, school liaison programs, victims' services, and specialized enforcements, all because the RCMP partnership is stable, reliable, and predictable. Why would we ever jeopardize that? Why destabilize a system that is already working for families, seniors, farmers, and local businesses? Bill 4 does not strengthen that model. Bill 4 introduces uncertainty, and it does so at a time when Albertans need stability.

The New Democrat vision for safe communities is through real investment, Mr. Speaker. We believe public safety is built on evidence-based policy, stable funding for front-line services, well-supported police and sheriff partners, strong relationships with municipalities, and prevention, not just reaction. Instead of chasing a billion-dollar provincial police force, we believe in funding RCMP detachments properly, supporting sheriff highway patrol to increase commercial vehicle inspections, supporting municipalities in community-based policing, investing in mental health response partnerships, and strengthening the Alberta 911 system, not downloading more responsibilities without support.

4:50

Alberta doesn't need a new police force. Alberta needs the systems we already have to be properly resourced. Mr. Speaker, Albertans are tired of political experiments, tired of uncertainty, and tired of the province drifting from one policing idea to another without listening to the people on the ground, without listening to the people in the communities like Sherwood Park. Strathcona county knows what effective public safety looks like, front-line workers know, municipal leaders know, and Albertans certainly know.

Let's put our focus back where it belongs, on supporting the RCMP and local enforcement, on supporting sheriff highway patrol

and commercial vehicle safety, on stability, not upheaval, and on building a safer, stronger Alberta through real partnerships, not political theatre.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: I will recognize the Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak against Bill 4 because Albertans have been clear that they do not want a provincial police force. While I alongside my colleagues on this side of the House acknowledge the improvements to Clare's law, including the co-operation and information-sharing between police and other agencies, I truly wish that this government would have incorporated this into a standalone bill instead of trying to force an Alberta provincial police force onto Albertans when they have been crystal clear.

I've had folks like Lori e-mail me, not only my office but I know the offices of the minister and the Premier, who have said quite aptly: "Public safety decisions should be based on consultation, transparency, and evidence, not politics. Albertans deserve a say in how their communities are policed, and right now you're not listening."

In the past couple of months alone I, like my colleagues at least on this side of the House, have received hundreds of e-mails just in the last few months alone from folks just like Lori telling us that they do not want a provincial police force. I know that that side is getting them, but they have done nothing to really show their constituents that they are listening to them except maybe leaving a colourful voicemail or two.

But on this side, Mr. Speaker, what we have heard is that our constituents have been loud and clear. They want the RCMP to continue patrolling their communities, because they are beyond satisfied with their work. Why are we complicating something that Albertans have not asked us for?

Mr. Speaker, this bill is just one successive piece of legislation that this government has put in place since being elected that they did not campaign on. It follows Bill 11 in fall 2024, Bill 49 in the spring of this year, and now this one, Bill 4. Each time we stand up in this House, we highlight what Albertans have told us loud and clear. They do not want this provincial police force. Albertans know that the jig is up. No sham panel will replace what Albertans have told us. They know not only is this unnecessary; it is going to cost taxpayers a heck of a lot to even get boots on the ground.

In previous debates about this government's ever-so-obvious creep into creating and setting the stage for their provincial police force, I've spoken about the needs of rural communities, especially First Nations, and nowhere in this bill does this incorporate the needs of those communities. Where is the funding for them going to come from? Well, this government has no clue, and that's the only thing that's crystal clear in this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, prior to getting elected, I was doing this work. I've spoken many times in this House, and just like my learned friend from Banff-Kananaskis, go and read my comments on these previous bills. I was looking into those options for my clients to implement policing options with the minimal opportunities available for First Nations in this province.

It is incredibly expensive to get a policing force up and running. Yet while I look at this bill or other bills put forward, Bill 11 in fall 2024, Bill 49, and now this one, I don't see any plans to incorporate First Nations or Métis settlements, not that this would help this bill, but perhaps I'd have a different tone. But alas, this government doesn't think about anyone in Alberta, and I know for sure that

Indigenous peoples in Alberta are certainly last on this government's list for their ineptitude over the last several years. But I digress.

My wonderful colleague from Banff-Kananaskis just spoke about policing needs on First Nations, and those still exist. The minister and many members on the other side wax poetic about how they're helping First Nations with policing. But where, Mr. Speaker? Where in any of these pieces of legislation are they doing that?

Again, it is expensive to get policing up and running not only personnel-wise but vehicles, branding, weapons, buildings. It all comes at a cost, and these costs are going to be downloaded onto the municipalities that are not going to have a choice to adopt this because this government refuses to consider them at any step in their authoritarian march forward. Guns, uniforms, and infrastructure upgrades alone may be \$42 million, and that's just to put in place 600 sheriffs. My colleague from Sherwood Park pointed out the costs of Grande Prairie, who is going through that shift right now. Just an initial startup with their current costs is \$19 million for that municipality alone, Mr. Speaker. There are 47 municipalities and 22 First Nations that the RCMP serve right now in the province of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, we know that cost is not going to be the same for smaller municipalities than Grande Prairie, but that's still a cost that we need to consider in this House because small "c" conservative estimates rest at \$1.3 billion over the next six years for this new provincial police force while we lose \$1.02 billion over six years of federal funding. Where is that shortfall going to be covered? Which portfolio is going to lose out for this government's private police force? Who is this government going to rob to pay for this program? They've already gone after the disabled, our health care system, education, justice system, not-for-profits, I could go on. But the reality is that while this government argues it is just balancing the books and being fiscally responsible, we see them just give away half a billion dollars to their corporate buddies in the blink of an eye.

Mr. Speaker, these are the questions that need to be asked, but that won't be answered by this government, and we know that. While Albertans are struggling to put food on the table, to pay for their hockey fees or their ever increasing car insurance or utility bills, this government wants to take their tax dollars to pay for something that they do not want. How backward is that? Albertans elected us to be responsible on their behalf, and this government fails at that every single day. It is a true shame.

Let's talk about what the costs will be offloaded down onto municipalities without their consent, just like this government has done with their ideological shift away from ballot-counting machines. And how did that turn out? Oh, wait. A 600-vote differential here in Edmonton alone: human error, because we are human. The government should be pretty used to that. Error is their default.

And tick-tock, Mr. Speaker: the RCMP contract is coming up for renewal in 2032. If my time in this House has taught me anything, that will be here in no time, just like 2027, when the NDP will replace the UCP as an ethical, competent government. What are Albertans saying? Well, municipalities like West Henday's neighbour the city of St. Albert, the former mayor Cathy Heron stated, "We have a good interaction with the RCMP here. We do get our individual issues expressed at the table. I have no guarantee that would happen at the provincial level. It's just trading one master for another."

But this government is no stranger to this behaviour. We've seen motions and legislation used against the autonomy of municipalities, from things like I mentioned – ballot tabulators – to housing dollars from the federal government, to speed traps, to

frigging bike lanes. This government certainly does not know how to stay in its lane, and it's pretty emblematic of this government.

But hey, don't take it from us or the Albertans we represent. How about listening to an expert in the area, like Brian Sauvé, the president and CEO of the National Police Federation, who said in no unclear terms, "Albertans have been clear time and again, they don't want to replace the RCMP. They want real solutions to real challenges like affordability, healthcare, and community safety, not a \$550-plus million political project no one asked for." Then the minister has the gall to reference the UCP's sham Alberta Next Panels, where mics were turned off on Albertans and corporal punishment threatened on a youth.

Mr. Speaker, this is not the Wild West. That is abuse plain and simple, and the same thing applies to this government passing bills like this through this Legislature without discussing it with Albertans and those that will be affected by their bad policy decisions. We've heard from mayors, councillors, and experts in policing, and they know that this is a bad decision.

Mr. Speaker, what has this province devolved into? While, on one hand, they pretend to care about children by passing nasty pieces of legislation which strip the Charter rights and freedoms of Albertans from Albertan children – because, yes, Mr. Speaker, those trans children are still Albertans despite this government trying to legislate them away.

5:00

Mr. Speaker, why are we doing this with youth unemployment at the highest in the country and while the government just voted to deny the youth differential wage being put to bed so that they earn \$10 below a livable wage in this province's major cities? We need to be focusing on the priorities of Albertans, not a provincial police force, not another waste of Albertans' tax dollars for something they do not want. For a government so fixated on spending money responsibly, they should be listening to Albertans on how to spend their tax dollars.

It is for these reasons, Mr. Speaker, that I just cannot support Bill 4 in good conscience with its current iteration.

The Acting Speaker: Any others wishing to speak? Seeing none.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:01 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Arcand-Paul	Eremenko	Metz
Boparai	Haji	Schmidt
Deol	Irwin	Shepherd
Eggen	Kasawski	Sweet
Elmeligi	Kayande	Tejada
Totals:	For – 44	Against – 15

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 3 Private Vocational Training Amendment Act, 2025

The Chair: Is there someone that would like to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to just make a few comments in regard to Bill 3, Private Vocational Training Amendment Act, 2025. Just to set the stage or some context, in April of just this year the Advanced Education minister had to sanction more than 20 private colleges here in the province of Alberta, had to suspend 64 licensed programs in 15 different private career colleges, and also allegations of loan ineligibility for students at five career colleges were levied due to audits that looked suspicious. So there are abundant reasons why the private career colleges here in the province of Alberta needed to have further regulation placed on them.

Hopefully, this might be a good start with Bill 3, the Private Vocational Training Amendment Act, 2025. I am in support of it, but I also have qualified support for this bill because many of these reforms have been brought forward by advocates five or six years ago. I know that Momentum, the Alberta Association of Career Colleges, and other bodies have been looking for regulation of private career colleges for up to a decade, so this is sort of some of their ideas, really, to try to clean up the private career college landscape here in the province.

Admissions to private career colleges have exploded over the last number of years, Madam Chair. It's partially due to our increase in overall population, but it's a whole lot to do with this UCP government starving out our public universities, colleges, and polytechnics over the last six years, taking almost a half a billion dollars out of the system and creating an artificial scarcity of positions in our universities and colleges and polytechnics that was somehow backstopped by an increase in private career colleges.

The problem, of course, is that private career colleges are exponentially more expensive to attend for a student; lots of financial barriers. And lots of regulatory problems, as we saw when more than 20 career colleges just this year got shut down because they were not providing the service that they were advertising or were running rackets around financing. You know, some of these private career colleges were directing students to payday loan companies to get their tuition at exorbitant, extortionate interest rates. All of this just had to have a stop put to it. There are lots of private colleges that do good business, and they are totally legitimate, but Madam Chair, I would say that definitely the root

problem is underfunding for our colleges, universities, and polytechnics in this province.

5:10

We know that we're told from when we're in high school and, you know, early graduates that you should go to postsecondary. It's a good idea. You will get a better wage. You will live a better life. You'll be healthier – right? – live in a different socioeconomic bracket, have opportunities put forward to you. But if there's no room for you in the colleges and the universities and the polytechnics, people are being directed over to these private institutions, some of them not giving a degree or a diploma that will allow students to follow that dream of bettering themselves for themselves and for their families.

You know, I look directly at this whole issue around blaming the federal government for changing international student regulations and then this government using that as an excuse to allow hundreds of positions in our colleges and polytechnics to be terminated, people losing their jobs because they were providing foundational learning and English language training and, you know, upgrading programming. But here we are with thousands of domestic students, who are Albertans who live right here, out of luck in regard to that same supplementary education that they need to finish those programs.

As a result, we have fewer people enrolled in the licensed practical nurse program, nursing attendants, all of the medical fields that we desperately need in our society right now to meet the needs of Albertans' health, for example, and thousands of people that would be happy to take those jobs or to take that programming but they don't have the supplementary remedial English and mathematics and so forth, programming that they need to be successful in those programs.

So it's a cautionary support of this bill. We have a place in our society for our private vocational training. There's more regulation that's definitely needed. Regulation is not necessarily red tape, Madam Chair. It is a way by which we can protect students and ensure the quality of standards and ensure that we're getting what we pay for in regard to education and getting the people educated that we need to create a better society for everybody.

With that, I do supply qualified support for Bill 3, but goodness gracious we need to do so much to bring our postsecondary up to a level that we need to be a 21st-century economy and society that can function properly so that we can all prosper. Thank you.

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

Member Kayande: Thank you, Madam Chair. This is ultimately a bill about consumer protection, making sure that students who are signing up in private colleges get the educational services that they requested and that they believe that they signed up for. Education funding is complicated. It follows the student on some level in terms of student loans. It also goes in some cases to the schools as block grants in the public system, and for private colleges it really is the tuition that pretty much drives the bus. Of course, before someone goes to school and upgrades their skills, they oftentimes don't have the economic wherewithal to fund that on their own.

The tragedy here is that somebody signing up for a course of study at a private college is paying a higher tuition than if that equivalent program were available in a public system. What that means is that if, you know, cost is a barrier for people attending public universities as well, if somebody has those barriers, then they're even more so for attending a private college. But these are programs of study that can actually offer a great deal of value for a

student if the student understands what they're paying for and they get what they're paying for.

I welcome an arrangement to this bill to regulate and ensure that consumers of private college educational services are getting exactly what they paid for. In my head I call this, like, a stop Trump university bill because it really does prevent extremely bad actors that we know of from the States, University of Phoenix and, of course, Trump university, from taking advantage of students who are vulnerable.

I thank my colleague from Edmonton-North West for talking about the programs that were suspended and the compliance orders that were made. Nobody wants to get into a program, have paid all their tuition, and then find out that their certificate is not valid or that their loans need to be paid back. That is an absolute tragedy, and we should never wish that on anybody who is trying to upgrade their skills.

Now, the tragedy, though, and the rise of private colleges is really predicated on the fact that the public university system has been so underfunded for so long and cannot in fact serve the population of students that we have. If we think that we have – and we do; oh boy, do we ever – a class size challenge and a class complexity challenge in our primary education system, well, guess what? Those kids grow up, and those kids grow up to go to university. I believe that by some metrics we need an entire new University of Lethbridge in the public system by 2030. We need all those spaces, and we can see them coming.

A bit of a digression. I did live in New Orleans for a little bit when I was younger. In that time I was unfortunate enough – I was only there for two years, but in that time we had, I believe, two tropical storms and two hurricanes hit the city where I lived. This was pre-Katrina, but it was still quite a shock for me when, you know, blizzards kind of are the thing that I'm afraid of. I'm not afraid of hot water, and in New Orleans it was very different.

It was amazing to me because you could see and everybody in the city was very well trained to take a look at what the weather reports looked like. They came out four times a day. I definitely got up in the middle of the night to see the 1 a.m. weather report. You could see the pattern of the hurricane rolling its way up the Gulf of Mexico. Whether it would hit the city of New Orleans or not was something that we needed to know two or three days in advance so that we could actually get out, not be stuck on a freeway that turns into a parking lot when everyone decides to leave at the last minute.

This is the kind of thing that I think about as far as the demographic issue that our colleges and universities are going to be facing. We can see that there is a hurricane coming, and this government has no plan for it. In fact, this government has no plan to ensure that the primary education system is robust enough that our children can actually attend university and then has no plan for ensuring that the universities are there for them. While Bill 3 is in and of itself wonderful in that it solves some of these problems, it solves problems that shouldn't exist if there was actually a university system that was set up to get students the education that they needed.

That system is going to be placed under even more stress as time goes on, as our population increases. As the Premier has talked about many times, she wants an Alberta of 10 million people. She wants an Alberta of 10 million people without bringing more doctors in, without bringing in more schoolteachers, without building more school spaces, without expanding universities, without building mass transit, without expanding the road network. You know, these 10 million people – I don't know – maybe are going to live European style or Russian style in, like, these massive apartment blocks that somehow the private sector will build as kind of 300-square-foot apartments for these folks. I have no idea what

the plan is for dealing with these 10 million people that the Premier wants here, but if she was serious about wanting that, she should probably even think about increasing the number of spaces for students and for postsecondary students.

5:20

In my constituency I'm lucky enough and fortunate enough to have Mount Royal University, a fantastic institution that provides a wide variety of education for people who are primarily, and interestingly, from northeast Calgary. In many cases many students attending Mount Royal are attending for the first time, are the first person in their generation to attend. It took an average of 93 per cent to enter the nursing program last year; 93 per cent. You can't tell me – nobody can tell me – that there is a substantive difference between a student with a 92 average and a student with a 93 average, and that's not okay, Madam Chair.

With that, I conclude my remarks. Thank you very much for allowing me the opportunity.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

Member Boparai: Thank you, Madam Chair. Today I rise to speak on Bill 3, the Private Vocational Training Amendment Act, 2025, a bill that is long overdue. For years we have seen troubling stories about students in Alberta being exploited by private career colleges, students misled into signing high-interest loans they didn't understand, students who were told that loans were free or that they didn't need to attend classes to receive funding, students who invested thousands of dollars only to find their programs lacked quality and credibility.

These stories are not isolated; they represent a systematic problem that has damaged trust in Alberta's vocational training sector. Vulnerable Albertans, including newcomers and low-income learners, have been targeted by aggressive recruitment tactics and false promises. For too long bad actors have prioritized profit over education quality, leaving students with debt and disappointment instead of opportunity.

Recent closures of private colleges have made this reality even more painful. Programs have been shut down abruptly, leaving students stranded without credentials, without refunds, and often with crushing debt. These closures underscore why this legislation has been needed for years. While Bill 3 is a step in the right direction, we must also recognize that action is needed for those who have already been harmed. Students who were misled and left behind deserve support and solutions, not silence.

Why has this bill been needed for so long? The number of students enrolled in private career colleges has exploded over the last decade from 16,642 in 2014 to nearly 75,000 in 2024. With this growth came increased reports of exploitation, high-pressure sales tactics, misleading financial information, and poor-quality instruction. Media investigations and advocacy groups like Momentum and Action Dignity have documented heartbreaking stories of students, many new to Alberta, trapped in cycles of debt because of deceptive practices. One student was signed up for a \$9,000 loan at 30 per cent interest without fully understanding what was happening. Others were told that they didn't need to repay loans or attend classes to receive funding. Madam Chair, these practices are unacceptable. They harm students, damage the reputation of legitimate institutions, and undermine Alberta's labour market. Bill 3 responds to this concern and begins to restore trust.

Bill 3 delivers reforms that students and advocates have been calling for for years. It introduces a tuition protection fund so that

when programs are cancelled, students are not left stranded with debt and no recourse. It makes tuition refund rules fairer and ensures that financial responsibility does not fall on those who have already been harmed. It strengthens oversight by requiring all vocational training providers to be registered and licensed, giving the government the authority to refuse or revoke licences when standards are not met. It expands enforcement powers so inspectors can investigate and act quickly against bad actors.

It also starts to tackle the root of the problem, lack of transparency, by banning financial incentives for recruiters and setting clear rules to prevent predatory practices. Importantly, it embeds a principle that vocational training must align with Alberta's labour market needs, ensuring programs lead to real jobs, not empty promises. Madam Chair, these measures are long-overdue protections that begin to restore trust and fairness in a sector that has failed too many Albertans for too long.

Stakeholders across Alberta have called for these changes. Momentum and Action Dignity have highlighted the need for stronger protections for newcomers and vulnerable students. Industry associations have welcomed increased oversight to ensure quality education and public safety. Students and alumni support the creation of a tuition protection fund and sector rules for recruiters.

This bill does not solve every problem overnight, but it is a significant step toward a fairer, more transparent system. It sends a clear message: students deserve better, and Alberta will not tolerate exploitation.

For years advocates have called for stronger oversight, but let us also be clear. Passing this bill is not the end of the work. We must take action to support those who have already been harmed by closures and predatory practices. These students cannot be forgotten. They need pathways to complete their education, access to fair compensation, and relief from crushing debt. Alberta's New Democrats will continue to push for solutions that address these urgent needs.

To summarize, Madam Chair, Bill 3 is about protecting students, restoring trust, and ensuring Alberta's vocational training system works for everyone. It strengthens oversight, improves transparency, and aligns programs with labour market needs. It ensures that students, especially those that are most vulnerable, can pursue education without fear of exploitation. The Alberta NDP supports Bill 3 because it reflects our values: fairness, accountability, and opportunity for all Albertans. We will continue to advocate for accessible, high-quality education that prepares students for good-paying jobs and a secure future, and we will keep fighting for those who have already been harmed by the failures of the past.

Thank you, Madam Chair. [some applause]

Member Miyashiro: Oh, that was pretty encouraging applause over there.

You know, Madam Chair, I think in principle the whole idea of having a vocational training act is a good idea. My dad had a small plumbing and heating and HVAC shop in Taber, and I think he welcomed the training that his staff received by accredited institutions. I think that's what this is all about, that we have accredited institutions that are regularly checked over. There are tradespeople on the other side of the aisle that did the training that they needed to do in accredited institutions.

What we're talking about here is protecting students. You know, it's something that really kind of bothered me this afternoon when I heard the Premier talk when we were talking about education. She said something about: welders should be teachers. Correct me if I'm wrong; I heard that. In reflecting on that, this goes to exactly what

this bill should protect against, because there was no one in my dad's shop that should have been teaching plumbing or heating or HVAC. Zero of them. They didn't have the skills.

In fact, Madam Chair, this is an issue of curriculum versus pedagogy, if I may, what you need to teach versus the ability and how you teach it. I think that's what this needs to go to the root of this, not just have a curriculum up there to say, "This is how it's taught"; one needs to give guidance to the institutions on how they do it.

In principle this is not a bad idea. In practice we're going to see if this government has the ability to monitor and supervise what these institutions are doing, right? And you know what? I don't want to say, "I doubt it" because that would be rude of me, and I'm not going to do that right now. However, we have to be cautious about what it is that we're looking for.

5:30

If we're going to have this kind of support for these kinds of programs, then this government has to ensure us that they're also going to monitor properly so we don't have the Trump university idea where people give a whole bunch of money to be taught, you know, the wonders of real estate and the art of the deal when all it was was a money grab, which is, I think, one of the reasons why this government put this in. There were private institutions setting up shops saying, "Hey, we'll teach you whatever," and it didn't happen and people lost their money. I think if this is going to be monitored properly and if we're able to engage the students and we're able to find out what the right way to teach these things is, I don't have a problem with that, and I don't think our caucus has a problem with it either. But I think there needs to be the right things in the regulations to ensure that we do this.

Madam Chair, I think I've said really what I need to say about this, so thank you for your time.

Mr. Haji: Madam Chair, in principle I support the bill, but where we have the problem is that we need to deal with the fundamental problems that exist within our institutions and within our communities. If you need financial support and you need to upgrade your English language or you need to upgrade your credentials, those are where these institutions come in and take advantage of those who need them most.

Madam Chair, I want to bring your attention to one thing here. It's the foundational learning assistance program that this province had. Many Albertans benefited. In 2015 we had 12,000 spots supported, but now – you will expect, because of the population growth, that we have increased the number of spots that are needed to be supported through the foundational learning assistance program – instead of increasing, we have reduced by 50 per cent. Technically we have now 6,000 spots where we used to have 10 years ago 12,000 spots. This is where people become desperate and those exploitative institutions, vocational training, take advantage of people who need some institutional admission or where they can get some training and support.

Examples are, like, you support learners that are preparing for postsecondary education and for employment opportunities, reducing barriers that marginalized groups face, providing financial assistance to adult learners. An example, Madam Chair: those ones who come here as newcomers and they do go through the ESL programs that are provided by the federal government, but that doesn't take them to the next level where we can put them into employment opportunities. The provincial government used to have support for those, and that support evaporated and doesn't exist anymore.

From 2015 to 2019, when the NDP government were in place, we used to support around 12,000 spots for foundational learning programs, but now, Madam Chair, according to the government records we have 6,000 spots that are to be supported through this program. This is where we need to deal with and address the need where it comes. I support in terms of addressing these vocational training and institutions that take advantage of people, but we need to prevent when people are going through the cracks and they are put into such a desperate situation to go to such institutions.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there others?

Seeing none, I will call the question on Bill 3, Private Vocational Training Amendment Act, 2025.

[The clauses of Bill 3 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report on Bill 3.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 3.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. So carried.

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 6

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

[Adjourned debate November 17: Ms Sweet]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and offer a few thoughts on Bill 6 this evening. This is certainly something that our caucus stands firmly opposed to because this really doesn't address the root cause of the educational problems that we're seeing in the province right now. You know, students in kindergarten to grade 3 are struggling with some numeracy and literacy challenges. That is beyond question. But what they don't

need are more tests to assess the problem. What they need are resources to solve the problem. We've heard from teachers and parents of students in school that the number one thing that could fix the problems of literacy and numeracy that are affecting our kindergarten to grade 3 students is additional class funding.

In the time that the UCP has been elected government, since 2019, Alberta has fallen to being the lowest funded classrooms, lowest funded educational system per student in the entire country, falling way behind Quebec, and our students' performance academically has suffered as a result. You know, when the international student assessment was carried out in 2015, Alberta students were at the top of the list in Canada when it came to science and math and reading comprehension. In fact, if Alberta had been its own country in 2015, something that members opposite are pretty enthusiastic about, we would have placed in the top five jurisdictions in the world in terms of academic achievement. But we are no longer in that enviable position because this government has continually underfunded education, and now we are falling behind many other jurisdictions around the world and within our own country, Madam Speaker.

You know, the 2022 PISA assessment shows that Quebec is eating our lunch when it comes to academic performance for elementary and secondary schools. They are leading the pack when it comes to reading assessments, and they are doing very well in mathematics and science, Madam Speaker. I don't think it's any coincidence whatsoever that Quebec is also the highest funded per student jurisdiction in the entire country. That's not always been the case. In 2015 the province of Quebec was right at the bottom of the pack when it came to per-student funding. They made a concerted effort, they put considerable dollars into their education system to advance the academic performance of their students, and it has paid off.

Mr. McDougall: Still behind Alberta.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, I hear the Minister of Advanced Education saying that they're still behind Alberta. Not for very long if this government has its way. In fact, this was a result from three years ago. It'll be interesting to see where Alberta falls when the PISA assessments come out the next time around. I would bet money that the Minister of Advanced Education won't have so much to crow about at that time. It's incredibly distressing, Madam Speaker, because, like I said, the education system in Alberta was one of the best in the world and this government has taken the wrecking ball to it and Alberta students have suffered as a result.

5:40

You know, I cast my mind back to not too many years ago when the government at least recognized that funding was part of the answer to solving the literacy and numeracy problems that Alberta's elementary students are struggling with. As Alberta was moving out of the COVID pandemic, the government committed dollars to addressing learning disruption that was caused by students being at home during the worst parts of the pandemic.

I was just looking through some of the numbers that the government had posted on the data portal. The Edmonton public school board, for example, in the 2021 fiscal year got about \$6 million to address learning disruption for elementary school kids. That was a little under \$500 per student. In 2022 and 2023 that number dropped to less than \$100 per student. You know, a real drop in the bucket when it came to addressing the real literacy and numeracy needs that our students experience, but at least there was a recognition that we needed to invest more money per student to address the learning disruptions that had occurred as a result of

COVID. It's unfortunate that we're now at the position where the government doesn't even want to admit that investing more money in our classrooms might actually do something to improve Alberta's students' academic performance.

I will note for those of us with longer memories that this learning disruption funding could have been a lot more. In fact, at the beginning of the pandemic when the then minister of education, now the minister of one of the health departments, rolled out school closures, she fired thousands of educational assistants by tweet but promised that that money that the government wasn't going to spend on EA salaries was going to be redirected into classrooms at some later time to address the learning disruptions. That was about \$128 million according to news reports of the day, but that money never went back into classrooms, Madam Speaker.

Like I said, we only had a few million dollars. I think the total in '22-23 was \$45 million and significantly less in the subsequent years. Perhaps the current or former educational ministers could tell us why they didn't even meet the commitments that they made in 2020 to addressing the funding shortfalls that they created and putting that money into addressing the learning disruptions that students experienced as a result of the COVID pandemic after the fact. That's another disappointment in a long line of disappointments when it comes to how this UCP government has failed to address a lot of the issues that our students are facing today.

You know, it's no secret that it's really those students with complex learning needs who need the most support, Madam Speaker, and there are a number of things that this government could do to give students who have those complex learning needs support but they fail to do. I'm talking about hiring an appropriate number of EAs. The government is crowing about its enforced contract with the Alberta Teachers' Association, saying that they were going to hire the same number of EAs that they promised to hire when the budget was released in the spring, but that doesn't do anywhere near enough to handle the number of complex needs that students are facing in the classrooms.

When the strike started in early October, I spoke with a number of teachers who came to visit my constituency office, and they really told me about the problems that they're facing getting supports with students with complex needs. They have seen a steady reduction in the number of educational assistants that they have but an increase in the number of students that each of those educational assistants needs to work with every day. Those ancillary supports that help those students, things like speech pathology, occupational therapists, have been steadily cut over time since this government took power so that a speech-language pathologist who would visit a school three or four times a week is now there once a week or even less frequently than that, Madam Speaker. You know, the government has made systematic cuts to the ancillary supports that would actually make a significant improvement in the academic performance, particularly for those students who have complex needs and need that support.

It's also incredibly frustrating, Madam Speaker, that parents with children with complex needs also can't get support from the government. I'm speaking about the FSCD program. Now, that is not a direct support to students in the classroom, but those students are going to school and they need support at home as well as at school to be able to be successful in school. This is not rocket surgery, as Don Cherry used to say, but the government refuses to provide funding for students with those complex needs through the FSCD program.

I had a parent of a young child in my office just over a week ago, Madam Speaker. She has a young son who was diagnosed early on with autism and attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder. She has been on the FSCD waiting list for over two and a half years. She

did everything right when it comes to trying to get support for her child. As soon as her son had this diagnosis from a doctor, she filled out the application, she jumped through all the hoops that the government put in front of her to make sure that that application was complete, and now that the application has been complete for over two and a half years, she hasn't heard anything from the FSCD program about whether or not her son has been accepted for supports. I think that's a particularly cruel treatment for parents who have children who need that kind of support.

At the very least, the government could be honest and say: "No, there's no more money left in the program. You're going to have to wait X number of months or years to receive these supports." But the government won't even tell them that. They just keep parents completely in the dark, waiting for an untold length of time to maybe or maybe not get support through the FSCD program. It's absolutely cruel, Madam Speaker.

This is another thing that the government could do today if they were serious about improving academic performance of students. They could provide all of those thousands of students or young children who are waiting for supports on FSCD to come through. You know, one of the frustrating things is that the longer those children wait for FSCD supports, the more complex their needs become. If a child who's assessed with speech deficiencies or other kinds of disabilities gets treatment early on, it becomes easier to deal with those disabilities, rather than waiting so long until the problems become so complex that they're almost unsolvable, Madam Speaker.

It's the old saying, of course: an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Convert that to metric: 16 grams is worth 454 grams of cure? I can't remember.

Member Kayande: It's 28 grams.

Mr. Schmidt: How much? Thirty-eight grams? Twenty-eight grams of prevention is worth 454 grams of cure, Madam Speaker. I want to thank my friend from Calgary-Elbow for helping me with the conversion for that. As the House well knows, the metric system is something that's very important to me and to the people of Edmonton-Gold Bar, and we do want to make sure that we're updating our idioms to reflect the metric conversion.

5:50

An Hon. Member: Elbows up.

Mr. Schmidt: Yeah, that's right. Students need to be able to do those conversions as well, Madam Speaker.

The final thing that the government could do today to improve academic outcomes is actually improve the working conditions for teachers. You know, treating teachers with the respect that they deserve would go a long way to improving the classroom conditions and make sure that teachers are bringing their best selves to the classroom every day so that the students that they teach get the best from the teachers. This government has undermined teachers' morale and insulted and demeaned teachers every step of the way for the last six years. It's incredibly concerning to a number of teachers, Madam Speaker, to listen to the Premier and other members of this government muse about whether or not teachers in the classroom even need an educational degree.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 6, the Education (Prioritizing Literacy and Numeracy) Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2). When I read this bill, the thought that occurred to me is that this UCP

government is a bad boss, terrible, a nightmare even. You know, we've all had this kind of bad boss, the kind that just keeps adding more work onto your desk. As they do that, they refuse to actually give you any additional resources to do that work: time, money, assistance. No. They reject your ideas when you raise them. Before you know it, you're in another board meeting, like, "Hey, I've got this great idea on how we can fix this problem," and they take credit themselves. They micromanage every step of your work, impose their bad ideas, make you follow them through, and when everything falls apart, they blame you.

That's this UCP government, especially when it comes to teachers and education. A lot of other things, too, but I mean, I don't know, it put me in mind – actually, did you ever read the cartoon strip *Dilbert*? The pointy-haired boss: that's this government through and through. We've seen it repeatedly. My colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar just noted it. For six years under UCP governments teachers have never been treated with such disrespect and contempt. More and more work dumped on their desk, no support provided to help them with it, shut out from every consultation, ignored for months while they told this government what they needed, only to have this government then invoke the notwithstanding clause to strip them of their right to strike and demand what they needed and then come back around and say: "I've got this great idea. Let's talk about classroom complexity."

It's an insult, Madam Speaker, and it's no wonder that, just like in the health care system now, in our education system morale is at rock bottom. Coincidentally, the same minister helped us get there in both. The fact is that what we have here in Bill 6 is salt in the wound after this government just paid the biggest insult teachers could ever imagine, after this government just used legislation to strip them of their Charter rights, imposed a contract they had rejected, and forced them back into the same classroom conditions they've been protesting against.

It's clear that this is not a government that cares about teachers. It's a government that does not care about students because what it is doing with Bill 6 is not trying to solve any of their problems. They're adding to them. Bill 6 essentially is mandating new testing. The same teachers that are struggling to keep up with the workload in the classroom, who have overcrowded classrooms, who don't have the space to properly work in, who don't have the educational assistants to help them with students who have unique, complex learning challenges are now being told that they're going to have to do an extra set of tests.

And this is from the government that actually diminished the amount of reporting we were doing. They stopped tracking things like classroom sizes. They stopped tracking information, as they've done across – again, same minister, health care and education, degrading the collection of information in both because that's what this government does. They try to hide the facts. They try to hide the deep damage that they're doing, and now they come around and say, "Hey, well, we actually should maybe start collecting some information on how students are doing" six years in, after they've run our education system into the ground. What an insult to teachers. What an insult to students. What an insult to parents, to Albertans, Madam Speaker.

This is a government that doesn't want to measure anything it actually does. They don't actually report on things though they like to have a lot of fun with numbers. Some of them like to just pull them out of their head, make them up on the spot. Others just like to massage them, twist them, torque them any way they can. But

this is not a government that is using data to actually try to make things better for Albertans because that's not their intent, Madam Speaker. This government is not here to make things better for Albertans. This government is here to make things better for themselves. When this government brings a bill in, it's not to make things better in the classroom; it's because they're trying to cling and hold on to power.

Indeed, what we have seen when it comes to our public institutions like health care, like education – this government is not interested in building them up. They're interested in tearing them down to replace them with privatized versions, to replace them with opportunities for their friends and supporters and donors to make money. They're interested in tearing these systems down and salting the earth so that they'll never have the chance to stand tall and proud again.

As the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar said, we used to have an education system that was the pride of Canada, indeed stood tall amongst jurisdictions around the world. We are not there anymore because this government tore it down, undermined it, underfunded it, outright attacked it. We used to have a health care system that stood pretty tall across Canada. It wasn't perfect; there was certainly work we could have done to fix it. This government wasn't interested in that. They wanted to tear it down, and they have created a massive new bureaucracy and are delivering far worse care to every Albertan.

Now they want to impose new bureaucracy, new requirements, new tests on the students in grades 1 to 3 and on the teachers that are struggling to provide the quality of education that we used to be able to provide in this province, which this government has ensured these students will not enjoy. That's not the fault of the teachers. It's not the fault of the schools. It's the fault of a government that's a terrible boss, that creates chaos, disruption, disrespect, and then goes: huh; can't figure out why this isn't working. The beatings will continue until morale improves. Let's be clear. That's metaphorical, Madam Speaker.

So it's difficult to find any reason why we would want to support Bill 6. Now, the government will of course say: "Well, hey, other provinces are doing this. The province of Manitoba just voted in favour of bringing in this kind of testing in grades 1 to 3." Well, the province of Manitoba also has class cap sizes, much higher per-student funding. Because the thing is, Madam Speaker, when you actually support students, when you actually keep a reasonable classroom, when we actually fund it at a reasonable level, well, you know what? Then you can actually test for success. But what this government wants to do is test first and blame teachers, and blame others for their failure, their choice to force Alberta's schools to fail.

But the thing is, Madam Speaker, you know, I did a lot of door-knocking on Saturday, our provincial day of action, with Alberta's New Democrats. Talked to a lot of teachers. Saw a lot of those yellow-and-black signs on lawns. I can tell you, I have never seen Albertans so awake and engaged and, let's be clear, furious with their government. This little piece of legislation here is going to make teachers' lives harder. But I'll tell you, if they keep making teachers' lives harder, they're going to make their lives harder. We're going to be happy to help.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but the clock strikes 6 p.m., and the House stands adjourned until 7:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Prayers	309
Introduction of Guests	309
Members' Statements	
Government Caucus	310
Holodomor Memorial Day	310
Holodomor Remembrance.....	310
Seniors' Supportive Housing in Trochu	310
Communicable Disease Prevention	311
Youth Employment	311
Oral Question Period	
Education Policies	311
Election Recall Legislation.....	312, 315
Physician Compensation Legislation.....	313
Greenhouse Gas Emission Reduction.....	314
Energy Industry Property Tax Payments.....	315
Health Services Procurement Process.....	316
Christenson Developments' Life Leases	317
Drought Damage Mitigation.....	317
Government Policies and Cost of Living.....	318
Immigration Policies	318
Introduction of Bills	
Bill 203 Energy Storage Planning for Investment Act	319
Bill 9 Protecting Alberta's Children Statutes Amendment Act, 2025	319
Division	319
Tabling Returns and Reports	320
Tablings to the Clerk	320
Orders of the Day	321
Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech	321
Division	321
Division	322
Government Motions	
Address in Reply to Speech from the Throne.....	322
Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 5 Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2025	322
Bill 4 Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2)	323
Division	333
Bill 6 Education (Prioritizing Literacy and Numeracy) Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2)	337
Committee of the Whole	
Bill 3 Private Vocational Training Amendment Act, 2025	334

