



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature  
Second Session

# Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, November 24, 2025

Day 14

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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Arcand-Paul, Brooks, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)  
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA,  
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)  
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)  
Boitchenko, Hon. Andrew, ECA, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)  
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)  
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)  
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)  
Brar, Gurtej Singh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)  
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)  
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de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)  
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)  
Dreeshen, Hon. Devin, ECA, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)  
Dyck, Nolan B., Grande Prairie (UC)  
Eggen, Hon. David, ECA, Edmonton-North West (NDP)  
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Ellis, Hon. Mike, ECA, Calgary-West (UC),  
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Glubish, Hon. Nate, ECA, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)  
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Gray, Hon. Christina, ECA, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),  
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Kasawski, Kyle, Sherwood Park (NDP)  
Kayande, Samir, Calgary-Elbow (NDP)  
LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, ECA, Red Deer-North (UC)  
Loewen, Hon. Todd, ECA, Central Peace-Notley (UC)  
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Nixon, Hon. Jason, ECA, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre  
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Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)  
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Smith, Hon. Danielle, ECA, Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC),  
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Tejada, Lizette, Calgary-Klein (NDP)  
Turton, Hon. Searle, ECA, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)  
Wiebe, Ron, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)  
Williams, Hon. Dan D.A., ECA, Peace River (UC),  
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Wilson, Hon. Rick D., ECA, Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)  
Wright, Justin, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UC)  
Wright, Peggy K., Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)  
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),  
Deputy Government Whip  
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)

## Party standings:

United Conservative: 47

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 2

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Mike Ellis	Deputy Premier, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services
Mickey Amery	Minister of Justice
Andrew Boitchenko	Minister of Tourism and Sport
Devin Dreeshen	Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors
Tanya Fir	Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women
Nate Glubish	Minister of Technology and Innovation
Nate Horner	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
Grant Hunter	Associate Minister of Water
Brian Jean	Minister of Energy and Minerals
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Martin Long	Minister of Infrastructure
Myles McDougall	Minister of Advanced Education
Dale Nally	Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction
Nathan Neudorf	Minister of Affordability and Utilities
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Rebecca Schulz	Minister of Environment and Protected Areas
R.J. Sigurdson	Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation
Searle Turton	Minister of Children and Family Services
Dan Williams	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Rick Wilson	Minister of Mental Health and Addiction
Muhammad Yaseen	Associate Minister of Multiculturalism

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chair: Ms Lovely  
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring  
Batten  
Getson  
Haji  
Johnson  
Lundy  
Sawyer  
Singh  
Tejada

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chair: Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Wiebe  
Arcand-Paul  
Bouchard  
Brar, Gurinder  
Brar, Gurtej  
Getson  
Gray  
Sinclair  
Singh  
Stephan

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

Chair: Mr. Sabir  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Lundy  
de Jonge  
Eremenko  
Lovely  
Renaud  
Rowswell  
Sawyer  
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### **Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship**

Chair: Mr. Dyck  
Deputy Chair: Ms Sweet  
Al-Guneid  
Armstrong-Homeniuk  
Calahoo Stonehouse  
Cyr  
Ip  
Petrovic  
Rowswell  
Yao

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, November 24, 2025

[The Speaker in the chair]

### Prayers

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

Hon. members, as this is the first sitting day of the week, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Anna Jaremko. I invite all to participate in the official language of your choice.

### Hon. Members:

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

### Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

**The Speaker:** The Legislative Assembly is grateful to be situated on Treaty 6 territory. This land has been the traditional region of the Métis people of Alberta, the Inuit, and the ancestral territory of the Cree, Dene, Blackfoot, Saulteaux, Iroquois, and Nakota Sioux people. The recognition of our history on this land is an act of reconciliation, and we honour those who walk with us. We also acknowledge that the province of Alberta exists within treaties 4, 7, 8, and 10 territories and the Métis Nation of Alberta.

### Statement by the Speaker

#### Former MLA Manmeet Singh Bhullar

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, today I would like to remember a former colleague. It came as no surprise to anyone who knew Manmeet Bhullar that on November 23, 2015, while travelling from Calgary to Edmonton, he stopped to help a stranger stranded in a snowstorm. What did surprise and sadden all of us was that his selfless act of kindness led to his untimely death. Manmeet served the people of Alberta and in this Chamber for seven years, eight months, and 21 days, a total of 2,822 days, in both ministerial and opposition roles.

I had the privilege of working alongside him and calling him my friend. When we lost him, we were heartbroken. We remain heartbroken, and what I said 10 years ago is still just as true today. We miss his contributions and perspective, his boundless energy, his kind heart, and his infectious laugh. Manmeet had a big smile framed by a thick, full beard, and he would often joke that with great beard comes great responsibility. Members, let us honour that sentiment. Let us carry forward that responsibility and continue the great work that Manmeet so passionately dedicated his life to.

Please be seated.

### Introduction of Visitors

**The Speaker:** It is my honour to introduce to you today a very important guest seated in the Speaker's gallery whom I had the pleasure of meeting this morning, the ambassador of the Republic of the Philippines, His Excellency Jose Victor Chan-Gonzaga. His Excellency is accompanied by Mrs. Emma Sarne, consul general of the Republic of the Philippines; Mr. Victorio Dimagiba, Jr., vice-consul general based in Calgary; and Ms Mary Jassel Menteer, vice-consul who is based in the embassy in Ottawa. I ask that you please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** Today Sheila Ethier and her team of dedicated volunteers shared their good work with us in the lower rotunda, and if you didn't get down there, you really missed something. Since 1996 the Blankets of Love Foundation for Mental Health has provided thousands of handmade quilts to patients in hospitals across Canada. Each quilt is lovingly crafted by community quilters to offer comfort, dignity, and hope to individuals facing mental health challenges. The foundation's mission is to change the way mental health is viewed through compassion and support while honouring the legacy of Brandon Ethier, whose life was lost to mental illness. This program is deeply valued by patients and hospital staff, and demand continues to grow. Blankets of Love relies on donations to keep this heartfelt initiative alive and welcomes support to help bring warmth and care to those who need it most. I ask that Sheila, her son Jason Ethier, and her team please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Now, generally speaking, I would be warning people that you can't actually hang things over the balcony, but we're making an exception today. Are we okay with that? Yeah.

Today's wonderful rendition of *O Canada* was led by Anna Jaremko, who has been part of the LAO's venue services team for the last three years. Originally from Poland, Anna tells me she traded perogies for poutine when she moved to Canada with her husband 20 years ago. She performed in church and school choirs until her two daughters arrived and life became busy. We are glad to have you here, Anna. Please rise to receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Okay. School groups today. The hon. Member for St. Albert.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you 85 students from Lago Lindo elementary school. I'm doing the introduction for the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs. I ask them all to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

**Mr. Kasawski:** Mr. Speaker, there's a group of students here from Wes Hosford school along with their teacher and chaperones. They're here to learn about democracy and our Legislature, so I ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**Mr. McDougall:** Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce three leaders from Alberta's postsecondary community joining us today from Bow Valley College. Please welcome the mighty Dr. Misheck Mwaba, president and CEO; Ms Tasneem Rahim, vice-president of external engagement; and Ms Vicky Chio, chief of staff.

**The Speaker:** The Minister of Primary and Preventative Health Services.

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you and to all members of the Assembly Dr. Hans Herchen, president of the Alberta Dental Association; Dr. Carol Martin, incoming president; CEO Sandi Kossey; Jenna Petrovic; and Lucas Warren. Thank you for joining us today and for all the great work that you do each and every day. Please rise and receive the warm welcome.

**Member Boparai:** Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Kashifa Sohail, a Calgary-based artist and instructor who donates her art to community fundraisers, volunteers to lead workshops for underprivileged groups, and promotes artist therapy for newcomers. She is joined today by her husband Muhammad and children Zain, Rafi, and Nashra. I ask that they rise to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Edmonton-Strathcona.

**Mr. Nenshi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you Helen Dong and Vanessa Mo, who are citizens from my riding of Edmonton-Strathcona. I ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

**The Speaker:** Camrose.

**Ms Lovely:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Chamber Wil Amundson, a resident of Camrose. Wil is an avid motorcycle enthusiast, travelled the Kananaskis highway, which he describes as his most memorable trip this summer. Through his life Wil has travelled to every province in Canada and every state in the United States on his motorcycle. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Chamber.

**Mrs. Petrovic:** Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the MLA for Airdrie-East it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you the founder of Airdrie Angel program, Matt Carre. The Airdrie Angel program has supported 146 families in need of support. Contributions like these keep our communities strong, and we're grateful for the work his program does. I ask that he please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** St. Albert.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you three very special guests who are from the Sturgeon hospital. I thank them for their service: Bev Nobis, Dan Nobis, and Terrie Aromin-Smith. I ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

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

**Mr. Sigurdson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you members from Alberta Canola here in support of Canola Advocacy Day: Cheryl Westman, Justin Nanninga, Al Hampton, Jeannette Andrashewski, Bijon Brown, Will Holowaychuk, and Troy Sherman. During unpredictable times these people are fighting for our canola industry, standing up for them globally. Will you please rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Are there more introductions? The Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

**Mr. Sinclair:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce a special young guest of mine in the gallery today. Remy

Foster is here with his class to observe the Alberta Legislature and learn how democracy works. If he could rise and we could all raise a hand for him and make him feel extra welcome today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

## Members' Statements

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

### New Stollery Children's Hospital

**Mr. Wiebe:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this morning the Minister of Infrastructure made a vital announcement on an important project to Alberta families. For years the Stollery children's hospital has provided northern Alberta and western Canada a place of hope and healing as families are forced to navigate the scariest times of their lives. The Stollery is a national leader in organ transplants for children and cardiac surgery.

As Canada's second largest children's hospital, more than 300,000 children receive care at the Stollery every year, but with Alberta's economy growing strong, more families are choosing to call Alberta home. With this increased growth comes higher demand for health services, and the Stollery is no exception. That's why our government began investing in this project in 2021 and committed another \$11 million over three years in Budget 2025 to advance the design and planning of this important project.

Located on the U of A's south campus on the northeast corner of 122 Street and 51 Avenue, the new location offers ample space and flexibility for future expansion, vital requirements for a hospital that will need to grow and adapt as health care needs continue to evolve. Once completed, this new hospital will give children the freedom to be kids in all areas of the building, not just selected floors and wings, as it currently stands.

Mr. Speaker, this would not have been possible without the immense support and collaboration by the U of A and the Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation. These key partners have made it possible to announce the site of the new children's hospital today. Once built, it will support Albertans for years to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Calgary-Foothills.

### Alberta Voters and Government Policies

**Member Ellingson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite seem to find themselves in a bit of a pickle right now. Every single piece of legislation that the Premier and her office foisted on them is landing with a thud, hurting their popularity and their constituents. They really want to end the session and go home, but the problem is that citizens are unbelievably angry. Increasingly we see how the UCP MLAs don't know how to deal with criticism from their constituents. They often respond in ways that appear dismissive rather than engaging openly with citizens who are expressing legitimate concerns about their agenda.

There are a lot of online posts suggesting the minister of agriculture may have exposed a constituent who started a recall petition against him to ridicule and harassment in the way they engaged. Not to be outdone, it seems the Member for Airdrie-East suggested, using her taxpayer-funded position on her taxpayer-funded letterhead, that anyone in a public servant position should never ever criticize the government. That's odd given that the Premier said in her maiden speech, "If municipal leaders and school board officials can't speak out against the government out of fear . . . they might lose grants, where is the free speech?"

What's a poor UCP member to do? The longer they stay here, the less likely they are to get re-elected, but the sooner they go home, the less likely they are to get re-elected. Indeed, when they go home, a third of them are now facing recall petitions from their own constituents, not busting activists, not radicals but neighbours and grandmas going door to door, collecting signatures because they've had enough. The only solution for the UCP is to try and be a better government. But one thing we keep seeing in this session: this doesn't seem to be something the Premier is willing to do.

**The Speaker:** Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

### Canola Industry

**Mr. van Dijken:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to recognize Alberta Canola Advocacy Day at the Legislature. This day provides an important opportunity for all of us to learn about the tremendous contributions Alberta canola growers make to our province, our economy, and our communities. Alberta Canola Producers Commission represents over 12,000 growers across this province, all of whom play a vital role in advancing one of Alberta's most important agricultural success stories. What began as a made-in-Canada innovation has grown into one of our province's most valuable crops.

Each year Alberta farmers produce millions of tonnes of canola and generate billions of dollars in economic activity. The industry supports thousands of jobs in many different fields, which includes seed production and processing, transportation, and research, meaning that it greatly helps to sustain rural communities and drive economic growth across the province.

Beyond its economic impact, canola represents Alberta's spirit of innovation and environmental stewardship. Our farmers continue to adapt cutting-edge technologies and sustainable practices that reduce emissions, protect their soils, and enhance biodiversity. From biofuels to food production, canola is helping to build a more sustainable future both here in Alberta and around the world.

Today we welcome representatives from Alberta Canola to share their stories and advocate for this vital industry. Their hard work, dedication, and innovation ensure that Alberta remains a global leader in canola production. On behalf of all members of this Assembly I want to thank Alberta's canola farmers and industry partners for their continued leadership and for the essential role they play in feeding our world and fuelling our economy.

As we look ahead, let's continue to stand with Alberta's canola growers. Let's support their innovation, champion their sustainability efforts, and ensure that this world-class industry remains strong for generations to come.

### Christenson Developments' Life Leases

**Ms Hoffman:**

To whom it may concern:

Our parents weren't rich. Mom was a teacher and dad a social worker. They worked hard. When they were in their 70s, they sold their house and put everything, \$305,000, into a life lease owned by Christenson Developments. They didn't want to be a burden. They got a two-bedroom apartment, community events, music, reception seven days a week. Nurses were a call away, and they were told that when they needed it, they could move into assisted living. Greg Christenson promised that he'd give them back all of their money whenever they left, and they believed him.

Mom and dad loved it, and for years it was great. But when mom got sick, the nursing care did not come. The life lease repayment cheque queue began. The assisted living wing closed,

and services were cut. Dad noticed the changes, but he still trusted Greg. After mom died, dad was given the choice of renewing the lease or renting. Dad just wanted to know he had a home, so he renewed. He died six months later, and we joined the queue. We're still there, unable to close his estate.

Now, there's this court case. Christenson Developments broke every promise they made to our parents. They took their life savings, all \$305,000 of it, and the UCP let it happen. Part of us is grateful that our parents aren't here to feel this betrayal. They did not deserve this and neither does anyone else.

A few months ago the government promised we'd be made whole. We're waiting for that promise to be kept. If the current government doesn't keep it, I'm hopeful that Alberta's New Democrats will form the next government because American-style health care and profiteering off vulnerable seniors isn't Albertan, and it certainly isn't what Albertans voted for.

Signed, one family among many.

1:50

### Oral Question Period

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

### Economic Development and Job Creation

**Mr. Nenshi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unemployment is up nearly three points since this Premier took office. Our unemployment rate is the highest outside of Atlantic Canada despite the Premier's suggestions that the economy is rocking and rolling. This summer the Premier pitched a unique jobs plan, unique because it had no actual job creation in it, and then a week later, after some bad numbers came out, they put in a new plan of corporate subsidies, which has had basically zero impact. Does the Premier think the unemployment rate is a problem, and what is her plan to fix it?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Premier of Alberta.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We remember the bad days when the NDP were in power and we had 13 quarters of out-migration. We had stagnant job growth. More people were interested in . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, this is not a great start. We're going to hear the answer.

**Ms Smith:** More people were interested in leaving than coming here. In fact, the minister of energy at the time said: if you need a job, go to British Columbia to get one. Since we came in, there has been record employment; there has been record job creation; there has been record business formation. We know that we have a problem with youth unemployment, and we're working on making sure that we've got a program in place to be able to bridge that gap, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Nenshi:** It's interesting that the Premier looks back to '15 to '19 because her unemployment rate is flirting with being just as high as the highest it was under the New Democrats during a global recession in the absence of a global recession. She has no credibility here.

I don't know if the Premier has been up to Fort McMurray lately or if her MLAs have told us what's going on on the ground there, but essentially they've had zero housing starts for three years. Despite record oil production the jobs haven't come back. In an age of AI and automation destroying jobs, can the Premier tell us what commitments she has from producers that if they increase production, they'll increase jobs?

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

**Ms Smith:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that Albertans will be interested in knowing whether the members opposite support us in trying to get a deal with the federal government so that we can increase pipelines. They didn't support Northern Gateway the first time that it came through. They sure didn't support Keystone XL. In fact, they allowed for these bad laws to come in one by one by one and chase 2 and a half million barrels per day of investment outside of the country. I would welcome it to see if the member opposite would finally support pipeline development, would stand up to Avi Lewis, the future leader of his party, who said that there doesn't need to be any oil production.

**Mr. Nenshi:** I would love if this Premier knew anything about building pipelines beyond a pipe dream. I've met with people in agriculture, in tourism, in other job-creating industries; every one of them feels ignored by this Premier. She's easy to fly off to the Middle East, which has very low foreign direct investment in Alberta, but she doesn't do the work to lift the tariffs on agriculture products set by China and India. Saskatchewan's Premier went to China to fight for his producers, and our Premier is nowhere to be found on these files. What is the Premier doing to get these tariffs on canola and pulses lifted?

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

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask the member opposite to check the record because Dubai has many investments through their sovereign wealth funds here, \$30 billion in fact. Most of it is right here in Alberta, and they want to do a whole lot more. Last week I met with the Chinese consul general, and I'll be meeting with the Chinese ambassador this week. This morning I just met with the Indian consul general as well as the ambassador to Canada, and we talked about agriculture and the need to be able to have a tariff-free relationship. We'll be planning trips in the new year. I'm very excited about that. Hopefully, we'll be able to have a federal and provincial co-ordinated effort. We'll be able to get those markets open.

**The Speaker:** For the second set of questions . . .

**Mr. Nenshi:** We, too, are very excited.

**The Speaker:** . . . the Leader of the Official Opposition.  
You have to wait till I finish, Member.

**Mr. Nenshi:** Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

We, too, are very excited about the Premier's travelling because when she's overseas, she does less damage here.

#### **Auditor General's Report on DynaLife Contract**

**Mr. Nenshi:** Last week the Premier suggested that the former CEO of Alberta Health Services destroyed DynaLife documents. We now know that's not true. This is such a pattern of behaviour with this government. For example, a recent FOIP request to the government about the Edmonton Police Commission returned zero documents from the Deputy Premier, but the same FOIP request directly to the Edmonton Police Commission returned reams of documents set by the Deputy Premier. So will . . .

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, when I stand, you need to stop talking. That's every time.  
The hon. Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the member opposite didn't get his question out, I can tell you about all the great things that we are doing and that I feel very proud of. I can tell you that today we announced that we have the Stollery hospital. That is going to be the next new hospital in Edmonton, and I'm very excited about being able to provide the same kind of quality care that they have been renowned for. They're the second largest hospital service already in the facility that they're in. They serve more than 300,000 kids a year, 12,000 emergency and other surgeries, and we're very supportive of the work that they're going to do and can't wait to see them get built.

**Mr. Nenshi:** Happy to give the Premier another try at answering the question of why her government destroys documents. The Premier denied responsibility for the DynaLife deal, saying that it predated her; she stepped in to fix it. That's not what the Auditor General found. It wasn't until DynaLife pulled out that anyone took action. What the Auditor General actually said was, "Minimal records were kept of important discussions between AHS executives, the Minister and the Department of Health – including those where key decisions were made." Why did the government – the government, not AHS – keep so few records? What don't they want Albertans to know?

**The Speaker:** A point of order was noted at 1:56.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask the member opposite to read the report again because time after time after time they talk about AHS not keeping records. We co-operated on our side, we provided the documents, and we will continue to co-operate. There are certain cabinet documents and advice to cabinet that the member opposite should know is always kept confidential until such time as decisions are made; we need to be able to ensure that we get good advice. But I'm glad to have seen that the Auditor General wrote that report, and we'll be looking at implementing some of the recommendations.

**Mr. Nenshi:** The sentence I read clearly blamed the government, not AHS, and the Premier keeps forgetting that she runs AHS. When the Premier started this job, there were already questions about this contract; she did nothing. It wasn't her that ended this contract. It was DynaLife who pulled out when they realized they couldn't do it. So let's review: more than \$125 million wasted, lab services ground to a halt, patients failed to get the test results they needed. Why would anyone trust this government with another privatization, another revamp of health care, when they demonstrated their incompetence time and again?

**The Speaker:** The Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General's report just proves to us we're going in the right direction, making sure that we are taking the function of procurement out of Alberta Health Services and bringing it into Acute Care Alberta. We're going to ensure that all of the recommendations from Judge Wyant's report as well as recommendations from this report are brought into government practices. We're just as disappointed that there were processes missed, that AHS didn't follow the rules. As a result, we ended up having to make a decision to ensure that patient care was protected, and that's what we did.

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

### Physician Compensation Model

**Mr. Nenshi:** Every single time the Premier blames her own department, her own bureaucrats, she shows how incompetent she is as a manager and a leader, and this wildly incompetent government is at it again.

**Mr. Schow:** Point of order.

**Mr. Nenshi:** They've announced the biggest dismantling of public health care since medicare was introduced. They've done it with zero consultation, zero research, zero expert advice. Once again, they're making it up as they go along and will blame someone else for its failures. The consequences of this wholesale American-style for-profit health care will be disastrous. Will the Premier tell us what experts told her that privatizing medicare would reduce wait-lists?

**The Speaker:** The Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I noted with great interest that the *Globe and Mail* editorial board chastised the member opposite, saying that this isn't American-style medicine; it's Australian-style and Norway-style medicine and Swedish-style medicine and Finland and France and Austria and the U.K. and the Netherlands. There are a lot of universal systems in the world that make sure that everyone is protected, make sure they get the care they need without having to pay out of pocket but also provide for a limited amount of additional work to be done with private patients. We've always had the ability to have public patients and private patients, public doctors and private doctors. We're just going to allow them to do both.

**The Speaker:** There was a point of order noted at 1:58.

**Mr. Nenshi:** I'm really interested to hear those jurisdictions because clearly the Premier has not researched them. In not one of those jurisdictions did public wait-lists go down when a hybrid system was introduced. It's certainly true that the people with a lot of money will get services a lot quicker when you set up this kind of two-tier health care, but for regular people we see no evidence that access will increase. In fact, it will not. Can the Premier just simply confirm that the goal of her two-tiered medicine scheme is just this, that the wait-lists will go down only for the people who can afford to pay for faster services?

2:00

**Ms Smith:** That's not true, Mr. Speaker, and I invite the members opposite to take a look at the legislation when it's introduced. What is going to happen is we're going to start by protecting the public health system by ensuring that those who are offering public service and public delivery are going to have to provide the same level of services they did before taking on private patients. They will be able to operate in the evenings and on weekends. The sad reality of our system is that surgeons are rationed on their care. They don't get all of the operating room time that they could to treat patients, and this is why we have to try something different.

**The Speaker:** Hon. Premier, you can't raise debate about the legislation till – the hon. member didn't raise the actual legislation; he talked about government policy. Just as a friendly reminder.

**Mr. Nenshi:** The Premier seemed remarkably less confident on that answer than the one she's usually prepared for because she knows the facts are not on her side. In fact, the doctors are against this plan. The AMA says it "will not achieve its intended outcomes." They

say it "will inevitably draw specialists away from the public system, forcing cancellations and eroding emergency coverage in public hospitals and facilities." The Premier is doing this without any workforce planning, without any expert advice. She thinks those burnt-out surgeons and nurses will just work evenings and weekends. Where will the workforce come from for this scheme?

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

**Ms Smith:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good thing we put forward the Peterson law last week so that professionals are going to be able to speak up and be able to say what their true views are. You know what? I got CCed on a doctor's letter that they had written to the AMA saying that, actually, they support what we're doing because they have seen that it works in other jurisdictions. They are looking forward to trying a new model, and we're seeing with a lot of the commentary that people are wanting to have a different approach so that we can address the issues of making sure that patients get the very best care. We're going to have more doctors, more surgeons coming to Alberta, and I can't wait for it.

### Information Requests on Public Safety and Emergency Services Minister

**Mr. Shepherd:** Mr. Speaker, earlier this year we asked the Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Services for copies of any correspondence between the minister and the Edmonton Police Commission. We were told twice that no records existed. But when we filed the same freedom of information request with the Edmonton Police Commission, well, they sent us a stack of correspondence, 130 pages, including five letters signed by the minister. To the minister of public safety: can you explain this? How is this anything other than a blatant attempt to hide information the law says Albertans have the right to see?

**Mr. Ellis:** Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to meet with the mayor earlier this morning. I had a wonderful conversation with him. He did not bring anything up about the Edmonton Police Commission. What we did talk about is how this government has reduced opioid fatalities in this province and the great work that we're doing regarding posttreatment recovery in the Edmonton area. Opioid numbers are high, and we're working with the Edmonton Police Service to make sure that we're going after organized crime.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Mr. Speaker, no answer to the question, and Albertans deserve one. Staff in his ministry twice claimed these letters didn't exist, and that's been proven to be a blatant lie. It's a pattern we've seen again and again. When Albertans request records . . .

**Ms Schow:** Point of order.

**Mr. Shepherd:** . . . this government denies they exist, delays their disclosure, and then insists nothing was wrong despite the fact that this is against the law. Now, this minister is in charge of overseeing the enforcement of the law in Alberta, so can he tell this House what review his ministry will conduct to find out what happened and whether anyone will be held accountable for withholding records of his own correspondence?

**Mr. Ellis:** Mr. Speaker, the office of public safety complies with any FOIP requests that come into our office. Certainly, if the member has something that might be different, then certainly that's something we'd be willing to look at, but I can tell you that people

within my office, people within the department always comply with any FOIP request that comes in.

**The Speaker:** A point of order was noted at 2:04.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Mr. Speaker, the fact is that they did not comply, and it's not just this ministry; it's government-wide aversion to transparency. Alberta's Information and Privacy Commissioner investigated and found this government created internal procedures intentionally designed to break the law and deny public record requests. This government responded by changing the law to make it even easier for them to keep information from the public. They continue to twist and torque the law to find new ways to wrongfully deny Albertans, media, and opposition the access to information they have the right to see. Will the Premier just admit that her government is so drunk on power, they think they don't have to be accountable to any Albertan?

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

**Mr. Ellis:** Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I'm sure the member opposite is aware that FOIP requests are done by the civil service within our province, and we certainly thank them for their work, but I will tell you that certainly the former minister of health, if I recall, in that 20 some-odd billion dollar organization had zero documents because everything that she did was in voice mode. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Hon. members. Thank you.

After the next question there will be no preambles on the supplementaries, and that starts with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

#### **Auditor General's Report on DynaLife Contract** (continued)

**Ms Sigurdson:** The DynaLife deal hurt the services Albertans received. They faced serious delays in getting routine lab tests while Albertans lost at least \$125 million in this bad deal. The Auditor General tried to find answers but instead found there was destroyed evidence. The Premier blamed the former CEO of AHS for shredding notebooks, but she has denied it in a new interview. Who destroyed the evidence the Auditor General needed to do a full review of the DynaLife deal?

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

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government co-operated fully and provided records as per the standard of government procedure and practice with the Auditor General.

**Mr. Schmidt:** No. Wrong. Nothing could be further from the truth.

**Member LaGrange:** Well, I was tasked on day one, when I became the minister of health in June of 2023, to look at DynaLife.

**Mr. Schmidt:** You were busy shredding. Busy shredding documents is what you were doing.

**Member LaGrange:** At that time we were seeing that . . .

**Mr. Schmidt:** Hundreds of documents in the shredder: is that what you were seeing?

**Member LaGrange:** . . . there was a lack of service, and we wanted to ensure that, in fact, Albertans got the service that they required. We're going to continue to make sure that it improves, and it has improved.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Continue hiding things.

**The Speaker:** Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, I don't remember calling your name, yet I heard nothing but you for the last 35 seconds.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Given that the Auditor found that "records were password protected and inaccessible, missing, or destroyed when key staff were terminated" and given that the minister directed the plan to privatize lab services and hand this contract to DynaLife and given that the Auditor General found "minimal records were kept of important discussions between AHS executives, the Minister and the Department of Health – including those where key decisions were made," why has this government shown such a total disregard for transparency?

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

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can't speak to what AHS did in regard to the investigation by the Auditor General, but I can say that we co-operated as is per practice. That being said, we continued to make sure that as DynaLife transitioned to . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, you can start over with 35 seconds, and I intend to hear it this time. Go ahead.

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it was very apparent that . . .

**Mr. Schmidt:** You were going to be found out.

**Member LaGrange:** . . . DynaLife could not fulfill its obligations . . .

**The Speaker:** Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, I warned you once. You just won't stop. Stop until you're recognized. That's how it works here.

Go ahead with a fresh 35, please.

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I became the minister of health, it was very apparent that we needed to do something to correct the problem. Even though DynaLife had the contract for Edmonton and north for over a decade and were providing really good service, they were unable to continue that good service in Calgary and south. Therefore, we transitioned them over to Alberta Precision Labs, and we can say that Albertans have received excellent service since that time period. We're going to continue to monitor it and make sure it continues to improve.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Given that the Auditor General made a request to preserve evidence, not destroy it and given the Auditor stated, "We found evidence that AHS was not the primary decision-maker in the outsourcing of community laboratory services during key stages of the procurement process," given that this comment implicates the UCP government, who directed privatization which cost Albertans hundreds of millions of dollars and hurt people's basic health care, how can Albertans trust this UCP government's decisions when they keep destroying evidence?

**2:10**

**Member LaGrange:** Mr. Speaker, again, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, I will also remind the House that I was not the minister of health at the time that decisions were made. But we did, the Premier and I, as soon as we were elected and as soon as I was appointed, take this situation very seriously. We made efforts and made sure that we corrected the problem that was ongoing. We

removed the contract from DynaLife. It is now with Alberta Precision Labs, and they're doing an excellent job.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

### New Stollery Children's Hospital

**Mr. Rowswell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's population continues to grow, as does their need for health care close to home. We are happy to see a site for the new stand-alone Stollery children's hospital announced today. The Stollery children's hospital is where children across the province, western Canada, and the Territories can receive specialized care and treatment. To the Minister of Infrastructure: why is a new stand-alone Stollery children's hospital so vital to Alberta's families?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

**Mr. Long:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A new stand-alone Stollery children's hospital is vital because Alberta's growing population means that more families need access to specialized pediatric care close to home. The current facilities are stretched, and this new hospital will provide space for future expansion, advanced treatment, and research partnerships with the University of Alberta. The environment created by having a stand-alone children's hospital allows children to thrive in a more caring environment tailored to their needs.

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

**Mr. Rowswell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that response. Given that the new site is going to be located at the northeast corner of 122 Street and 51 Avenue on the University of Alberta's south campus, to the same minister: why was this location selected for a new stand-alone Stollery children's hospital, and what benefits does this site have over others that were considered?

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

**Mr. Long:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The University of Alberta's south campus was chosen because it offers ample space for a modern, world-class children's hospital and the possibility for future expansion as needed. The site is currently undeveloped green space, allowing construction to proceed without demolitions or relocations, streamlining timelines and reducing costs. This location ensures accessibility for families while supporting Alberta's long-term vision for specialized health care close to home.

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

**Mr. Rowswell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that response. Given that the government has now selected the site to build this brand new stand-alone children's hospital, which is a significant investment in health care infrastructure, to the same minister: what is the plan for the existing space that will be vacated once the transition happens? Is there a redevelopment strategy in place so that the space continues to serve Albertans effectively?

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

**Mr. Long:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the current focus is on planning and building the new stand-alone Stollery children's

hospital, we recognize the importance of ensuring existing spaces continue to serve Albertans effectively. Our government is currently assessing, as part of the planning process, how we can maximize the use of the space of the 236 beds that will be vacated by the Stollery children's hospital once it moves to the new location to provide additional beds to the rest of Albertans. This was such a good-news story today, members of the opposition even showed up to celebrate with us. It's good for Alberta, good for kids, and good for the future of our province.

### Travel and Expense Reporting by Government

**Member Batten:** This summer, to avoid accountability, this government changed the expense disclosure policy. A freedom of information request our caucus received shows that the government will not reveal who made the decision, when discussions were had about it, or who decided to remove previously disclosed expenses from the website. How could no one in the government know how the decision to hide gifts and expenses and to remove the public data from the site – how does nobody know, and who is accountable for this?

**The Speaker:** The Minister of Justice.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The reality is that we introduced a bill in this House that thoroughly analyzed, debated, and reviewed the legislation in question, the Conflicts of Interest Act. There were some amendments introduced within this Assembly. That member was certainly part of the debate and part of the conversation that happened.

The reality is that this was a very public debate that passed in this House in a very democratic process, and that's the way that this thing works in this province. The member knows this very well. She certainly knows that it happened in the public eye within the floor of this Legislature.

**Member Batten:** Given that this government time-allocates more than any other government before them and given that Albertans want more transparency, more oversight on how taxpayer dollars are being spent, not less, and given that the corrupt care scandal shows this government doled out contracts to friendly insiders and given the government's own officials do not know who made the decision to strip the expenses from the website and that the Premier herself claims to be confused how this decision was made, who's in charge over there, Mr. Speaker? Will someone, anybody, take accountability for hiding this information from Albertans?

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

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the member opposite for asking the question. This policy was brought forward. The spirit and the intent of this policy was to make sure that documents and disclosure forms did not include personal information or things like patterns of behaviour when it comes to hotels that are being stayed at. This is an issue of safety concerns. It was clear that when this was introduced, it went a bit too far, unbeknownst to us, so we took measures to ensure that we have transparency in the government while also maintaining the safety of all members.

**Member Batten:** Given today all members have the opportunity to support Bill 202, No More Skyboxes Act, and given not a single Albertan would oppose more transparency about how government members receive gifts from insiders and given how only the people who oppose disclosing these gifts just happen to be the same ones

who can't remember how that came off the website, will the government allow its members a free vote to support Bill 202 and restore ethics, accountability, and some transparency in this government?

**Mr. Schow:** Again, Mr. Speaker, I rise to answer the question from the member opposite, and I certainly appreciate her concern about disclosures and making sure that things are transparent within the government, which they are. The policy in question was to ensure that government documents that were disclosed to the public didn't include things like patterns of behaviour when it comes to hotel stays. This was an issue of safety that was raised by a number of people in the public as well as members, so we acted. Clearly, the policy went a bit too far, unbeknownst to us, so we made the changes to make sure that everything was disclosed, as it should be.

#### Automobile Insurance Rates

**Ms Wright:** Mr. Speaker, the lovely folks of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview are struggling. They know they're looking at yet another big increase to their car insurance next year, and that's in addition to all the other costs that keep going up, sometimes feeling like that happens every week, costs like groceries and school fees. Why isn't this government prioritizing the needs and the bottom line for everyday Albertans who are stuck with high insurance prices?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are prioritizing the concerns of Albertans. That's why we're going to the extreme measure of actually changing the entire system for auto insurance. What you see right now is an interim stage where we're trying to get to January 1, 2027, where we're still dealing with the system that caused these more expensive premiums in the first place. We have a rate cap in place to protect Albertans while we get to January 1, 2027. It can't last forever. It's a short-term measure, but that's how much we're concerned about Albertans.

**Ms Wright:** Given that the Finance minister recently said that he couldn't commit to keeping next year's hike at 7.5 per cent, which means, of course, even higher costs and making it even harder for Albertans to make ends meet, and given that this government has walked back their claim of savings under their new insurance model, one that Albertans do not want, why should my constituents believe anything this government says about making their lives better when all it seems to do is make life harder?

**Mr. Horner:** I think I must have been misquoted there, Mr. Speaker, because I don't recall saying something like that. In truth we've already made the decision that it's staying at seven and a half per cent. That decision has been made. It will be like that for the course of the upcoming 2026 year.

**Ms Wright:** Given that in 10 years Albertans have seen an 82 per cent change in their insurance premiums, the highest in the country, and given that Alberta currently has the second-highest average on auto insurance rates in the country and given that tying the auto insurance rate cap to inflation would be an easy, effective solution for today's high prices and something that could actually help Albertans, would this government support an NDP proposal to do so?

2:20

**Mr. Horner:** Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker, and here's why. I'm not shocked the opposition doesn't understand how this works. You need to have premiums that are reflected in what your actual costs

are going out the door. The rate cap itself doesn't even cover those costs. The insurance companies in Alberta lost 1 and a quarter billion dollars in 2024. We are trying to get to January 1, 2027, where we will have a new system. I remind everyone once again that we're taking the biggest cost driver out of the system.

#### Aquatic Invasive Species

**Mrs. Petrovic:** Mr. Speaker, as Alberta continues to protect its freshwater ecosystems from a growing threat of aquatic invasive species, it's critical we assess the effectiveness of our provincial response. Albertans deserve clarity on the outcomes, challenges, and future direction of our aquatic invasive species program. With the 2025 season now behind us, to the Associate Minister of Water: how have we improved our program in terms of prevention and monitoring of aquatic invasive species in Alberta?

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

**Mr. Hunter:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Invasive mussels damage waterways, destroy ecosystems, and are impossible to get rid of once they are established. That's why we're investing \$18 million over five years to keep them out. We're employing cutting-edge technology by doing eDNA testing. Earlier this year we became the first in Canada to require mandatory watercraft inspection from boaters coming from high-risk jurisdictions. These are just a few ways we are protecting our pristine waterways and keeping our province invasive mussel free.

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

**Mrs. Petrovic:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his answer. Given that Albertans have shown commitment to protecting our lakes and rivers, with enforcement and education being a cornerstone of that success, and further given that thousands of inspections were completed during the 2025 season, to the same minister: can he please share with this Assembly how many inspections were completed, how many fines were issued, and what does the comparison of the two tell us about the effectiveness of prevention efforts across the province?

**Mr. Hunter:** I want to thank the member for this important question. We inspected more than 21,900 watercraft, setting a new provincial record in protecting our waterways. We issued over 4,700 proof of inspection stickers, 14 fines for failing to stop at an open inspection station, and three fines for failing to remove a drain plug on their watercraft. And our team stopped 13 contaminated boats from entering Alberta's waterways.

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

**Mrs. Petrovic:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister. Given that Alberta lakes and rivers are often used for recreational use, which means they're prime environments for the introduction and spread of aquatic invasive species, and further given that the movement of watercraft and equipment between different water systems heightens that risk, can the same minister share with this Assembly what he recommends Albertans do to protect our freshwater ecosystem from the growing threat of aquatic invasive species?

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

**Mr. Hunter:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Every one of us has a role to play in keeping Alberta free from invasive species. I want to thank Albertans for taking action

this year and encourage everyone to continue to clean, drain, and dry their gear. If you're a boater, make sure you stop at an inspection station so that you don't inadvertently bring in quagga or zebra mussels. The success of this program depends on all of us doing our part. When our government stepped up to protect our water bodies and water infrastructure from invasive species, so did Albertans. We thank them for the work they've done.

### Agricultural Concerns

**Mr. Kasawski:** Alberta agriculture is known for producing great food. Our exports to China, India, Japan, Mexico, and many other countries show that our producers truly feed the world, but trade fights are having an impact. Producers must adjust to shifting global markets, which impact food prices for Albertans at home. So with Canadian canola effectively shut out of China and huge uncertainties trading with the U.S., will the minister explain what his government has done to support canola growers facing this market access crisis?

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

**Mr. Sigurdson:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a really big issue. Just to put perspective around this: 2024, \$5 billion in exports to China, and of that, almost one-third comes from right here in Alberta. I've been very clear for over a year. The birthplace of this problem was Ottawa. It's time for Ottawa to step up and support our canola producers. We've been calling on it for over a year. Now is the time. They've suffered enough. We need action.

**Mr. Kasawski:** Or not Ottawa.

Given that diversification and value-added upgrading will support canola producers in oil and biofuel production, given Alberta's beef sector faces a deep structural problem because there is a lack of competition and two dominant processors set prices and limit market access, given there's a need to expand farm gate sales, protect local food security, and support economic growth while helping Albertans with high grocery prices, why isn't the government taking stronger action to encourage competition, attract new players, and invest in regional processing facilities?

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

**Mr. Sigurdson:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Apparently the members opposite haven't been paying attention to what's happening in the agricultural space. Under our agriprocessing investment tax credit we have had a record almost \$5 billion of investment happening in this province over the last three years. That is an absolute record. This government has created the space. We are now the beacon for agriprocessing investment, which is a benefit to farmers, ranchers, and every agriprocessor here in our province.

**The Speaker:** Without a preamble, the hon. member.

**Mr. Kasawski:** Given that in 2014 a provincial pilot program in Alberta enabled ranchers to donate cattle to food banks, with the government covering the cost of butchering, inspection, and packaging, given producers donated 130 animals, more than 17,000 kilograms of beef to Albertans through local food banks, given this pilot proved we can help ranchers, food banks, and Albertans living through this affordability crisis and these groups could use a hand paying for the processing costs, why won't the government reinstate funding to cover processing costs for food banks that donate cattle?

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

**Mr. Sigurdson:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's really important to point out that there is no government that has supported food banks more than this United Conservative government. We're looking at every opportunity to make sure our food banks have what they need to do what they do well, which is service the communities and make sure those that need a meal get that meal. We're going to continue to work with our food banks. We're going to continue to support our food banks. We're going to continue to look at every option available to make sure that people have that support in our community.

**The Speaker:** The next question goes to the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

### Support for Small Business

**Mrs. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Across Alberta we see communities backed by strong, local small businesses. They contribute capital, time, and resources to our communities and make them welcoming and supportive. In my constituency of Lacombe-Ponoka the town of Ponoka issued 350 business licences this year alone, with 22 new businesses opening shop in Ponoka. To the Minister of Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration: can you please tell this Assembly what steps our government is taking to further support small business growth in rural Alberta?

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

**Mr. Schow:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank that member for the question and encourage the members opposite to take note. That's how you ask a question in question period. Heaven knows small businesses are so important in this province, but the members opposite never saw a small business or a private-sector job they didn't try to kill. But in this province under this government we take very seriously the needs of our small businesses. That's why 95 per cent of businesses in Alberta are small. They're in rural Alberta. We're proud to support them and make sure that they feel the love from this government.

**The Speaker:** Lacombe-Ponoka.

**Mrs. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer. Given the Christmas season is fast approaching and the push to shop local is more important than ever, given that small businesses are better equipped to provide personalized services for local communities rather than a quick click for an anonymous online purchase, to the same minister: how is the ministry working to ensure that small businesses in rural communities continue to receive the infrastructure and economic support that they need to thrive?

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

**Mr. Schow:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I thank the member for the question and bringing up that, yes, we're drawing close to Christmas, a very special season as we commemorate and remember the birth of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. I can tell you right now that supporting local businesses in this time and making sure we remind people to buy local is essential. That's also why as a government we have supports for small businesses like biz link, which provides one-on-one free advice, coaching information about financing, training information, and about market expansion. We want to help small businesses in Alberta, all across the province, expand and make the most of their opportunities.

2:30

**The Speaker:** The member.

**Mrs. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that rural towns like Ponoka, Lacombe, Blackfalds, Alix, and Mirror are all hubs where the entrepreneurial spirit thrives and given that these businesses are more than just storefronts; they're stories of hard-working Albertans who have made a way for themselves, to the same minister: what programs are helping foster entrepreneurship in Alberta, and what initiatives are available for small businesses to navigate inflation, labour shortages, and access to capital?

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

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In response to that question I can say that we have a lot of supports for the province of Alberta and businesses here. It's important that businesses know that we have the trade accelerator program, also the Alberta export expansion program, helping businesses here in Alberta find new markets for their incredible products and supporting small and medium-sized businesses to grow on the international stage. Also, we have the Canada-Alberta productivity grant, helping them train their workforce to make sure they're able to meet the challenges of tomorrow in an ever dynamic, growing, and developing workplace. We are here for Alberta small businesses.

#### **Automobile Insurance Rates** (continued)

**Mr. Ip:** Mr. Speaker, Alberta is in the midst of an affordability crisis. Since the UCP eliminated the cap on increases, auto insurance rates have skyrocketed. With an average increase of 24 per cent between 2019 and 2020 alone, Alberta now has the second-highest car insurance rates in the country, with no end in sight to rising costs. In fact, rates will continue to go up before the transition to the UCP's private no-fault system in 2027. Does the minister agree that we need urgent action on auto insurance rates, and what is the government's plan to finally bring relief today to so many struggling Albertans?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to do round two on this question. We've done it. The good-driver rate cap is in place. It represents 70 to 76 per cent of Alberta drivers, holding it at a 7 and a half per cent increase. That's certainly not what Albertans may want to hear. It's certainly not what insurance companies want to hear because it doesn't reflect the actual cost of the claims being paid out. This has to be an interim measure for a system to be sustainable. We need to find some balance when it comes to premiums paid and claims.

**Mr. Ip:** Given that even with the so-called good-drivers rate cap that was introduced by the UCP, auto insurance rates are rising by 7.5 per cent in 2025, and that's only if one is eligible. Given that for a quarter of Alberta drivers rates will increase by an average of 15 per cent this year and given that according to MNP estimates, without any reform rates could continue to rise by 88 per cent, will the minister admit that whatever they are doing just isn't working and admit the government has failed to bring down costs for Albertans?

**Mr. Horner:** Well, I'll go halfway for the member opposite. The current system is not working, I agree. That's why we're moving to a new system. Like, the answer is in your question. This is a very expensive system. It's the second most expensive system in the country. There are things that make auto insurance inherently expensive in Alberta, our proximity to the Rockies, the value of the vehicles we drive because of our high wages. So what we're going to do is build a system that gives the highest benefits in the country and gives some price sustainability going forward. This should be what everybody here wants as we're representing Albertans.

**Mr. Ip:** Given that this government either refuses to take action or is incompetent or both and given that Albertans need meaningful action today on the rising cost of auto insurance and further given that if this government won't take action, we will and given that their fearmongering of insurance companies leaving is not actually based in fact, will the minister commit to supporting our sensible, common-sense proposal of indexing the rate cap to inflation, which is 1.8 per cent this year, and bring Albertans some real relief?

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, there was so much wrong in that question. I'm going to start at the beginning. The 7 and a half per cent does not come close to representing the actual costs in the system. Sure, you could make it 1.82 per cent. It would just make the bleeding worse. We would potentially lose more of the companies that are delivering this on our behalf. When I hear what the NDP is lobbying for – they want a tort system, so you still have the biggest cost driver, and you want it publicly delivered. So you want the worst for the ratepayer and the worst for the insurance . . .

#### **Indigenous Consultation on Bill 7**

**Member Arcand-Paul:** Mr. Speaker, in 1905 Alberta became a province, but in 1874, '76, '77, '99, and 1906 these lands first became known as treaties 4, 6, 7, 8, and 10 respectively. In 2024 and this session this government made changes to legislation to allow extraordinary powers to the minister to transfer water between river basins without consulting First Nations. Will someone across the aisle please explain if the province believes it has the right to manage water without consulting under treaty?

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

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're very proud of the engagements that took place over the last two years to update the Water Act here in Alberta. Every single Indigenous community across the province was reached out to, both by e-mail and direct mail, and capacity funds were made available so that they could meaningfully take part in that process. The Water Act has not been updated meaningfully in 25 years. We do need a modern system that helps us deliver water where and when it's needed. We've had two years of engagement, and we're very proud of the work that's been brought forward.

**The Speaker:** Sorry for not saying your ministry name. I was reading a note that I got.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

**Member Arcand-Paul:** Given from the minister's lips to God's ears and given that Bill 7 has been introduced in this House and that the ministry of environment claims to have engaged with First Nations, as we just heard, and further given that the ministry is

aware, per its feedback documents, that there were well-documented concerns about consultations with First Nations, can the minister of environment clarify with which First Nations she consulted, and does she believe accommodation may be necessary when it comes to managing water in this province?

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

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Every First Nation and Métis community was personally invited to participate in both rounds of engagement. Once again, all First Nations and Métis communities were also offered capacity funding so that they could take part meaningfully, provide feedback, and, of course, cover travel costs if necessary. Twenty-five First Nations and 13 Métis communities and organizations provided their input. There's no change in the public notification of licensing decisions or the ability for affected communities to raise concerns prior to any decisions being made.

**Member Arcand-Paul:** Given that I met with the chiefs this weekend, who are increasingly concerned about the path this government is taking with water management in this province, to the Minister of Indigenous Relations, a question from Tallcree First Nation Chief Rupert Meneen: is it just maliciousness or incompetence when it comes to this government's responsibilities to consult with First Nations, or should treaty First Nations be worried about the notwithstanding clause? [interjection]

**The Speaker:** Lesser Slave Lake, you're at the far end, and I could hear you almost as well as the question.

**Ms Schulz:** Mr. Speaker, I do want to reiterate that we take this very seriously. We, in fact, extended engagement on the Water Act to make sure that the voices of all Albertans were heard, and that does include municipalities, Indigenous communities, First Nations communities, and Métis communities. We wanted to make sure that we get this right. We know that water is one of our most valuable resources. We know we've also been experiencing a couple of years of very significant drought. We need a Water Act that addresses our needs today. I do want to be clear that the concerns are around public notification of licensing decisions. That will still happen.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

#### Road Construction in Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland

**Mr. Getson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure it comes as no surprise to you or the folks in God's country that our roads are vital to our economy. We have plenty of them here in the province of strong and free; 64,000 lane kilometres of highways, of which approximately 58,000 are paved. These are the backbones of our communities. We're grateful to men and women who work all season on the upgrades, maintenance, and new roundabouts, for example, and we would appreciate hearing more about the progress on a few key roads. Can the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors provide an update on Nikoodi Road and the highway 22 repairs?

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

**Mr. Dreeshen:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to that member for that very important question. I'm happy to say that design is under way right now. There is some land acquisition that's still required for the southern portion of the

Nikoodi Road in Lac Ste. Anne county. Tendering for construction will happen as soon as we can get that land, and work should begin early in the new year.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

**Mr. Getson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that highway 60 is a major route for Acheson industrial park and it's connecting highways, 16 and 16A, with the volumes of passenger and commercial traffic, and further given that these major, at-grade railroad crossings – when that train goes through, it brings traffic to a close, and it also cuts off the access to the local fire hall. To the same minister: can you please provide an update on the twinning project between highways 16 and 16A for highway 60 and the overpass?

2:40

**The Speaker:** Well, it's my fault, hon. members, and you'll have to forgive me. I was just reminded that I'm not really supposed to allow a question from the parliamentary secretary to the minister that the parliamentary secretary reports to.

**Mr. Getson:** No. Actually, I'm the parliamentary secretary for the Premier, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Well, then, I stand corrected. Carry on.  
The minister.

**Mr. Dreeshen:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, thank you to the member for that very important question. Improvements to highway 60 will ease traffic congestion, enhance safety, and improve the flow of industrial, commercial, and commuter traffic in the area. The project includes twinning four kilometres of highway 60 between highways 16 and 16A. Also, there will be a new overpass over the CN line. The project for this will actually be constructed in the new year as well.

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

**Mr. Getson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister. Given the importance of railroad service not only in my constituency but across the province and given that we've seen a contraction, unfortunately, of rail services for years in Alberta and further given that the regions that prioritize short-line rail and passenger service see significant economic growth, to the same minister: can you outline steps being taken to implement our government's rail plan in this province?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Dreeshen:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's passenger rail master plan is looking at how best to improve commuter traffic in and around the province. We've been engaging with Albertans to find the best way possible, but you know who we will not be taking any lessons from? The leader of the NDP. He prides himself on being a professor, but we have a whole bunch of summaries from his students that actually were in his classes, and here's my favourite: "This guy is so totally full of himself, we're lucky if we got to learn anything from his actual class. Mostly, we just learned about how highly he thinks of himself." That's what students actually thought of the NDP leader when he taught them.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, in 30 seconds we will continue with Members' Statements.

## Members' Statements

(continued)

### Livingstone-Macleod Constituency Concerns

**Mrs. Petrovic:** Mr. Speaker, Livingstone-Macleod is a region full of opportunity, opportunity that the opposition and some in Ottawa seem determined to ignore. We have ranchers producing the best beef in the world, yet the federal government is pushing cloned meat into the market, something nobody asked for, while our producers already meet the highest standards in quality and sustainability. That's not innovation. That's an attack on rural livelihoods.

We have communities ready to grow through tourism, agriculture, and responsible resource development, but instead of supporting balanced growth, the NDP and their federal allies preach one-size-fits-all solutions from downtown offices. They say yes to development when it benefits their ridings, but no when it comes to ours. For example, the Crowsnest Pass is being told to cross the border into Elk valley, B.C., if they want good-paying jobs. That seems like typical NDP fashion: blocking opportunity at every turn while forcing families to leave Alberta to make a living.

Mr. Speaker, my constituents aren't asking for handouts. They're asking for the dignity of work; careers, not contracts; stability, not uncertainty. They want to build lives. They want to be part of Alberta's economic engine, not left behind by ideological crusades. Livingstone-Macleod has the most stunning landscapes in the province. One might call it God's country. We care deeply about our environment, we protect it, we live in harmony with it, and we expect development to meet the highest standards.

Despite what the opposition says, we're not embarrassing cousins. We're not sewer rats. We lead the world in responsible resource development and agricultural practices. We can and we do balance economic growth with environmental stewardship. While the opposition keeps saying no to our jobs, no to ranchers, and no to rural Alberta, the people of Livingstone-Macleod have already spoken loudly, clearly, democratically. It's time that that side of the House stop preaching to rural Albertans. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, the tradition here is to not make noise during Members' Statements even if it's your own side's member's statement. We're going to see a great example of that now with Calgary-North East giving a member's statement.

### Cost of Living and Economic Growth

**Member Gurinder Brar:** A fair economy invests in people, a fair economy includes people, and a fair economy brings hope to people, but we are seeing hard-working Albertans struggling to afford a roof over their head. We are seeing hard-working Albertans not seeing a single dollar wage increase in the past seven years, and we have seen hard-working Albertans losing hope for better days in the richest province of the country.

The economy shouldn't have to be charity for hard-working Albertans. It should be based on evidence. Real wealth of our province isn't what's underneath our land; it's our people who live on the land. Wealth isn't just numbers on Excel sheets. It's clinics in our communities, schools in our neighbourhoods, and a clean environment for our future generations.

The UCP believes in an economy where wealth will somehow trickle down only when the wealthy insiders of this government feel generous, as if prosperity were a leaky tap that drips, Mr. Speaker. Albertans don't survive on drips, communities don't thrive on drips,

and Alberta cannot build its future on drips. We need an economy that flows: strong, steady, and shared by all.

Under an Alberta New Democratic government, the minimum wage will go up, doors for the wealthy insiders will be shut, and Albertans will get the life of hope, dignity, and respect. From High Level to Coutts, the message rings true: let's build an economy for the many, not the few.

### Presenting Petitions

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West. Lethbridge-West, I believe that your petition has been approved. Please go ahead.

**Member Miyashiro:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, it has. I'm very pleased to present a petition today from over 320 students from Brooks, Medicine Hat, and Redcliff. What they're asking for is that they're "[urging] the Government to introduce a bill implementing a hard cap on class sizes for schools across the province."

### Introduction of Bills

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Primary and Preventative Health Services.

#### Bill 11

#### Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2)

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to rise and request leave to introduce Bill 11, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2).

The proposed amendments would modernize physician rules, drug coverage, food safety, and health cards while improving oversight and administration in Alberta's health system. The proposed amendments reflect Alberta's evolving health needs, strengthen health care professionals' ability to deliver care, and improve accountability and efficiency across the system. They also represent a new era for health care in Alberta and reflect our commitment to implement a refocused health care system that supports improved health outcomes for all patients.

Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2).

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a first time]

### Tabling Returns and Reports

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

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I have a letter from Stephanie Radcliffe, a mother who lives in Spruce Grove-Stony Plain, advocating for proper funding and education.

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

**Mr. Wright:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got three tablings, and I'll make it quick. One shows that Alberta has the highest job creation October 2024-25 as well as year to date in both those time periods.

The second one I've got is that Alberta and Saskatchewan sit in the best place to ride out the dysfunction of the federal government's budget.

The third one is that the federal budget's fiscal target is unlikely to be met according to the primary budgetary office.

**The Speaker:** Edmonton-West Henday.

2:50

**Member Arcand-Paul:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite copies of a brief for this wonderful Assembly from the Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation, which is titled Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation Objects to Bill 7, Water Amendment Act.

**The Speaker:** Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

**Mr. Getson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a position statement from the American College of Pediatricians on gender dysphoria and interventions, citing a lot of the work and examples that have taken place in Europe. This is recent; May 2025.

**The Speaker:** Okay. Thank you very much for that tabling. Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have not forgotten about teachers. I've got a pile of letters that were collected by a lovely human named Tina that are urging the UCP government to invest in education and support teachers.

Thank you.

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

**Member Ceci:** Thank you. Tabling 36 letters from constituents horrified at the government's use of the notwithstanding clause, which robs Albertans of their human rights, particularly trans youth.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

Is there anyone?

**Ms Renaud:** Mr. Speaker, I have 13 e-mails to table, 13 out of about 50, from the Sigis Child Care association in St. Albert concerned with the government's inability to sign the federal agreement.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Thank you for that tabling. Let me just apologize there. When people are coming and going, sometimes when they're standing, it's hard for me to tell who's got the tablings and who doesn't.

Are there any more tablings? Oh, okay. All right. See, that's a prime example of when I can't tell. Looks like I see none.

Okay. That takes us to points of order. Well, they were all withdrawn except one. I know, I know; it's almost a table banger but not quite.

At 1:59 there was a point of order from the Government House Leader.

### Point of Order

#### Insulting Language

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the interest of time I did withdraw the first and third points of order, also because I'm just one heck of a nice guy, but in this instance I cannot withdraw this point of order. At the time noted, the Leader of the Opposition was speaking and said, according to my unofficial records, "Every . . . time the Premier blames her own department, her own bureaucrats, she shows how incompetent she is as a manager and [as] a leader." On May 6 of this year "Your incompetence and corruption are dangerous" was ruled out of order. This was clearly directed at the Premier. I believe this is a point of order under 23(j), which suggests that it's not allowed to use "abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder."

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

**Ms Gray:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the member I would apologize and withdraw.

**The Speaker:** Well, thank you. Might I say, that was the proper way to do that. I'm grateful, and the whole House should be.

### Orders of the Day

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

##### Bill 202

#### Conflicts of Interest (Ethical Governance) Amendment Act, 2025

[Debate adjourned November 17: Member Calahoo Stonehouse speaking]

**The Speaker:** Okay. Any speakers? Edmonton-City Centre, are you rising to speak on this?

When the Speaker stands, you need to not move.

Anyways, Edmonton-City Centre, please.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to stand and speak to the Member for Sherwood Park's private member's bill, Bill 202, the Conflicts of Interest (Ethical Governance) Amendment Act, 2025, a bill that speaks pretty directly to why I first decided I wanted to run for a seat in this place. I first decided I wanted to run for political office back in about 2012. That was after I'd had a chance to be involved in a few things in the community and, interestingly enough, my condo board at my building. Little is it known that a condo board can be a gateway drug to politics, but so it is.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, I was part of a condo board where we had real concerns, where we had individuals on that condo board who appeared to be doing things which favoured themselves, favoured a select few owners and seemed to be shutting others out, seemed to have a cozy relationship with the property manager. So we ended up getting a group of owners together, and I helped organize, to remove a couple of individuals from that condo board and reconstitute a move to a new property management company so we could exercise things fairly and ethically.

At the same time I was watching in the community. I had seen several folks that I knew from my time in the arts community who had bought memberships in the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta because they felt: "You know what? There's no way we're ever going to get this government out of power, so maybe we'll vote for a more progressive leader." So they voted to support Alison Redford to become the leader of that party and the Premier of Alberta. Needless to say, Mr. Speaker, they were bitterly disappointed.

I looked around and I saw the frustration, the apathy of these folks I knew, and I said: that has to change. So I decided I wanted to run for office, Mr. Speaker, to have the opportunity to try to show that politics could be done ethically, responsibly, that politicians could actually respond to their constituents, actually listen, be accountable to the people of Alberta. I didn't expect that I would be elected as part of the first New Democrat government of Alberta, but I had that opportunity, and I have the honour of continuing to stand in this place and represent Edmonton-City Centre 10 and a half years later.

But again, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that was key for me in wanting to run for this place was that we would conduct ourselves ethically. We have a long pattern of Conservative governments in this province losing track of their ethics, losing track of their accountability to Albertans, and very quickly turning to doing favours for themselves, bending if not breaking laws in place, or, as we've seen under this government, just simply changing legislation to their advantage.

Now, we have an abundance of issues in front of us here, Mr. Speaker, so many things that have been happening just in the last few weeks alone with the DynaLife report that's been laid in front of us, where we find out that – huh – mysteriously, records were destroyed, disappeared, where we have situations where we know we have the corrupt care scandal, where we have pretty credible evidence of some very concerning practices and procurement that seem to be connected with favours that were done for government members. So when this government chose to make changes to – of all things given the vast suite of things they could be working on to address for Albertans at a time when unemployment in the province is soaring, at a time when the health care system continues to be in chaos and disarray, when classrooms are overcrowded, when Albertans are struggling to afford the basics and necessities, this government's obsession was to be able to get better gifts for themselves.

Mr. Speaker, it took 44 years for the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta to reach the heights of entitlement and arrogance. This government rocketed there in about three or four, and they continue to find new ways every day to push that envelope even further in ways that would make Alison Redford blush.

What my colleague the Member for Sherwood Park has brought forward is an attempt just to rein that in a little bit, to return a little bit of respect to Alberta taxpayers. He is providing this government with the opportunity for sober second thought, to maybe think that at a time when they are stripping Albertans of Charter rights, maybe they shouldn't be so focused on whether they can get that \$500 or \$600 gift, whether they can sit in the skybox at a sports game or a concert, that maybe what we should be focused on in this Assembly is not how we get better things for ourselves but how we do better things for Albertans.

There's nothing drastic in this bill, Mr. Speaker. This bill simply returns things to a little bit more of a sensible place in terms of how we conduct ourselves as members and the benefits we enjoy. It helps to clarify a few things. Instead of a government that tries to push the envelope as far as they possibly can in terms of engaging in a conflict of interest – indeed, we have a Premier who was found to have contravened the Conflicts of Interest Act in what appeared to be an attempt to interfere in a criminal case. Instead, what this bill proposes is that a member would be in breach of the act not only by knowingly furthering a private interest, so being aware, actually doing it, but also if there's a reasonable perception that their decision-making was influenced by the private interest. Mr. Speaker, you know what might surprise you? Politicians don't enjoy a great reputation with the public. In terms of the most respected and trusted occupations, politicians are nowhere near the top of that list, and that's precisely because of the kind of behaviour we've seen from this government.

3:00

This particular change proposed by the Member for Sherwood Park recognizes that we don't just need to do better; we need to take it up another step, Mr. Speaker. We owe that to Albertans, not only that we don't actually actively engage in conflicts of interest, as we have seen has occurred on the other side, but we also avoid even the

perception of, that we be scrupulous in our being ethical in our work.

It requires members to withdraw from a meeting of the Legislative Assembly or cabinet in the case of an apparent conflict of interest. That seems pretty reasonable to me, Mr. Speaker. For example, the standing committee is going to be considering budgets and business requests from the Chief Electoral Officer, budgets that will empower him to be able to do the work he needs to do on recall petitions for, now, nine UCP MLAs. I would say that it would be a bit of a conflict of interest for any of those MLAs to vote on that budget because they are directly determining whether that officer has the ability to properly oversee their own recall petition. Bill 202 would require that. It would say that members would be in breach of the act if they use their position to influence any decision, not just decisions made by or on behalf of the Crown.

It would impose some stricter gifting rules on members, including a lower disclosure limit of \$100, which is what we had before, and rules around gifts from lobbyists, those with business before the Crown, and the Ethics Commissioner's approval. Certainly, we have seen an awful lot of friendly things happen for folks who used to be clients of a company for which the Premier worked as a lobbyist. So it's important, I think, that we consider these kinds of changes, again, to redeem perhaps a bit of trust in politicians in the eyes of Albertans. It also would lower the disclosure threshold to \$100 and ban gifts from lobbyists and those that did – oh, pardon me. I repeat myself. It's perhaps worth emphasizing, Mr. Speaker.

We will see today. I think we're probably going to have an opportunity to vote at second reading, and we'll see if this government, these members, actually support a higher level of ethics. Whether they feel they should show a bit of humility to Albertans given the cloud of scandal, the smoke which continues to gather thick around them. I think we owe that to Albertans, Mr. Speaker, which is why I personally will be supporting Bill 202, and I thank my colleague, the Member for Sherwood Park, for putting this forward. It is refreshing to see a bill in this House that puts Albertans' needs first.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker:** The Member for Calgary-Varsity.

**Dr. Metz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to speak to Bill 202, the Conflicts of Interest (Ethical Government) Amendment Act, 2025, which is really about ethical governance.

This UCP government has eroded public trust. Albertans should be able to trust their government to serve the public, not themselves or their friends. Albertans want more transparency, not more backroom deals. Bill 202 has been introduced by my colleague the MLA for Sherwood Park, and it is about bringing in stronger oversight and greater public confidence in how decisions are made. It improves the rules for mandatory code of conduct for members of the Premier's and ministers' staff as well as members themselves.

I am sure that Albertans would not be opposed to their Premier attending events. However, it is entirely different when there is an appearance that the tickets for those events may influence how their tax dollars are being spent or may be a reward for a decision already made.

We must ask: what is this government hiding? The UCP increased the limit for gift disclosure to \$500 and to \$1,000 for tickets. The thresholds in other provinces are either \$200 or \$250. This has been called modernization to move up to these very high levels. I certainly hope that the other provinces aren't all planning to follow this new trend. This new bill is for disclosure, which

simply means that the public will be made aware. This is only to make sure that the public knows. It does not prohibit a member from receiving a gift or attending an event. It says: what are you trying to hide by not disclosing these higher amounts?

This bill also requires a member to withdraw from a meeting of the Legislative Assembly or of Executive Council if there is a reasonable perception that the decision-making has been influenced by a private interest. Such an interest might be that the member has a relative that might gain from this decision or maybe a relative or an associate that will get large contracts, perhaps for a private surgical centre or a recovery centre. We really need this bill to reduce the chance that government decisions will help private interests rather than public interests.

This bill also prohibits gifts to members or their immediate family members from lobbyists or from those who have business with the Crown. It will require approval of the Ethics Commissioner, not the chief of staff, for any gifts over \$100 and for those gifts to be disclosed. What is the reason for not disclosing? There can be no apparent reason other than that there is something to be hidden.

Our Premier argued that markedly lowering the bar for disclosure hampered the government's ability to meet people and to represent Albertans at events. I would argue that Albertans are better represented if their Premier is actually seen at those events rather than hiding in a private box or behind some gift of where they can go and not be seen to be representing the public. I would also argue that there are many ways that Albertans can be heard, that the Premier and the government can meet with Albertans without having to go to an event where they're unable to disclose the value of the ticket or the value of the gift.

My background in life really comes from a family that was very engaged in politics and very engaged on different sides of the issue. My father was a lifelong NDP from his roots in Saskatchewan. He was the most fiscally responsible person you could possibly ever meet. I would never leave a room without turning off the light. My first bicycle was way too large for me, was what we call a one speed although he said, "You could pedal at different speeds," and he was so fiscally responsible that he would not even countenance me raising my own money to buy a 10-speed bicycle as I got to that stage.

My mother was onboard with the whole Lougheed government plans. She was a part of the party in many ways and was very much an insider in the Progressive Conservative government. There was nothing about my mother that was any different in terms of fiscal responsibility than the way my father was, but she really struggled during the Ralph Klein years and felt that during that time she could perhaps have a moderating influence.

### 3:10

It was when the group of insiders that she was part of until that time were planning to get rid of Stelmach by offering him a million dollars to resign. Following these discussions, she left. I can't say for sure if that happened, but that was the plan, and he very shortly thereafter resigned. The whole idea of corruption became a major discussion in our family, and the ideas that were happening, the things that were actually happening in the Conservative Party at this time were abhorrent to being involved in politics any further, and there just was no way of influencing these decisions that were being made.

I feel very strongly that we must have very strong and very clear rules around conflict of interest, that we must have ethical governance. I a hundred per cent support Bill 202, and I hope that you will come along and see that this is important for Albertans and it is only trying to make things more transparent.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Cyr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be speaking to Bill 202, the Conflicts of Interest (Ethical Governance) Amendment Act, 2025. If passed, this bill would require ministers, MLAs, and staff to disclose any gifts worth \$100 or more within 15 days of knowing about or receiving said gift. This bill plans to introduce a mandatory code of conduct for political staff, and it also broadens the definition of conflict of interest to include a perceived private interest of a member during decision-making. In other words, this bill would bring unnecessary red tape, which would cause redundancy in the current legislation.

The vague, open-to-interpretation regulations, frankly, only add more paperwork, rather than serving Albertans. Despite the lack of direction written in Bill 202, one thing is clear: it serves to introduce impractical, repetitive, and ambiguous changes that will only improve Alberta's current ethical governance framework. If Bill 202 is passed, the proposed \$100 disclosure threshold would create excessive administrative hurdles, inhibiting government members to focus on things that matter to Albertans. It's an arbitrary amendment as Alberta already has stricter benefit and gift rules than any other Canadian jurisdiction. Did you hear that, Mr. Speaker? It already has stricter benefit and gift rules than any other Canadian jurisdiction.

Legislating members of the Assembly to report every minor gift will simply not improve any transparency or accountability. Rather, it's a slippery slope that turns trivial interactions into excessive paperwork and inhibits the necessary flexibility for MLAs to do the good work their constituents expect they do. A good example of this is that recently I was honoured by my local friendship centre for being a contributor to the First Nations and Métis people. You know, Mr. Speaker, I will thank the organizers of that event. Janet was quite remarkable in the fact that she lived an experience when it came to ensuring that women throughout Alberta's voices were heard when there was violence against them.

In that presentation they gifted me with a blanket to put over my shoulders. The honour was just remarkable. And you know what? I have that blanket. It's in my office. Every time I look at it, I see that it was meaningful to all of my First Nations at that event. I'm very thankful. But, again, this gift was under \$100. I ask: what value is it to be moving forward these kinds of claims? I understand that if they gave me 100 blankets or 1,000 blankets, maybe for sure that would need to be put through here. But in the effort to make sure that we're bringing accountability to MLAs and the political staffers, this bill does not – does not, I repeat, Mr. Speaker – do that.

The NDP refuses to recognize that the government of Alberta is currently held to a very high ethical standard. With current legislation members cannot accept fees or value above \$500, which they are required to report in their annual disclosure statements for all gifts valued over \$250. In addition, members attending events are required to detail spending records if the cost is more than \$250. Bill 202 is simply restating existing provisions, adding unnecessary complexity instead of clarity.

Is this the goal, just to add more red tape? You know, that is the definition of the NDP. I will say that when it comes to red tape, they're for sure the leaders in all of Canada in bringing red tape to all Canadians if they're given the opportunity. This is yet another duplication in Bill 202, which is the reintroduction of an already existing and legislated code of conduct for political staff. I am unsure how the NDP fail to realize that this is already enforced.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this plan to expand conflict of interest to cover anything that merely is perceived as private gain leaves unclarity as to how it would be put into practice. Replacing the

current actual-knowledge standard with the reasonable-perception test creates vagueness and subjectivity. Ethics laws should be clear and enforceable and not open to interpretation or politicization. Our statutes would remain precise and concise, meaning that anyone should be able to understand what it would entail if legislated. This is something that cannot be said about Bill 202.

Within Alberta MLAs are expected to adhere to all laws governing their work and to do so with the highest ethical standards. That is certainly what I expect from my own caucus members, and that is what our current legislation has guaranteed. The Conflicts of Interest Act already states that members cannot “influence or seek to influence a decision to be made by or on behalf of the Crown to further a private interest of the Member.” Well, Bill 202 shows the NDP’s desire to micromanage elected government members.

Flexibility is essential to allow members to represent Albertans without undue restrictions. Hard coding thresholds and rules into statutes makes the ethics framework less adaptable to changing circumstances. Although we have stricter standards than other Canadian jurisdictions, the government of Alberta has made updates to ensure the limits and rules around accepting gifts to events for Members of the Legislative Assembly are flexible and don’t inhibit the ability to represent Albertans at high-profile and notable events, including the Calgary Stampede and the Edmonton expo. These changes were necessary because we have learned from previous limitations set years ago, which did not keep practice with the rising costs and current realities.

Albertans expect and deserve laws that are clear, fair, and effective, not confusing, overly complicated, or designed to leave partisan interests. They deserve a government that can act decisively, represent their communities, and respond to challenges without being bogged down by unnecessary bureaucracy. Strengthening ethics laws is important, but it must be done in a way that is practical, principled, and truly in the public interest. It should protect transparency and accountability without creating endless paperwork, restrictions, or a culture of fear. I urge the Assembly to put Albertans first and vote against Bill 202. We need to focus on meaningful reform and reject legislation that prioritizes political point-scoring over effective governance.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:20

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you.

The Member for Edmonton-Riverview. There’s a little over four minutes left.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m happy to add my voice to the debate on Bill 202, Conflicts of Interest (Ethical Governance) Amendment Act, 2025, put forward by my eminent colleague from Sherwood Park. Thank you so much for bringing forward this legislation. I think that more than ever before we need a government that’s ethical in Alberta, and, unfortunately, the exact opposite is what is currently in place.

The UCP brought forward Bill 8, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2023, which weakened the limits on gifts to MLAs and reduced the Ethics Commissioner’s oversight. You know, this was done when many, many other things in Alberta were needing to be addressed – chaos in our health care system, issues with affordability, significant difficulties with our education system – but the UCP chose instead to relax limits on gifts to themselves for tickets, for things that they benefit from. That seemed to be a big priority for them for some reason. That’s why this legislation is needed. We need to have the UCP actually be ethical and not take advantage of these things.

I mean, I think the Premier brought this in because she was caught red-handed. She was caught in a scandal where she was in a skybox because some friend of hers, who we now know received millions of dollars from government contracts, bloated contracts that required – the UCP made the decision to fire the board of Alberta Health Services and also the CEO when they were looking into how these bloated contracts could be given to this person who, of course, treated the Premier and other cabinet members with many treats.

We know the Premier herself was found guilty of violating the Conflicts of Interest Act when she interfered in a court case. You know, the UCP has no credibility on these issues at all. The Ethics Commissioner found her guilty of interfering in the case of preacher Artur Pawlowski. He was inciting violence at the Coutts blockade against the RCMP, and the Premier spoke to the Justice minister about this issue. And this is the government that wants us to listen to them about ethics? Please. Mr. Speaker, that is ridiculous. They have no understanding about credibility, accountability. They’re always blaming someone else.

It’s highly disturbing, and I’m so grateful to my colleague for bringing this forward because this government needs to be accountable. They need to actually know that there are guardrails and that we need to be respectful of those guardrails and there actually are checks and balances in government, that we need to have bodies that oversee us, and not to weaken. Not firing the Election Commissioner in the middle of a review of illegal activity during the UCP leadership race, not firing CEOs and the AHS board when they are actually trying to be responsible for the money that they’re allotted so that fairness in the procurement of contracts – and we know that didn’t happen. Their friends, like Sam Mraiche, made millions and millions of dollars.

These people are not the ones who know anything about ethics.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for Sherwood Park to close debate.

Oh, pardon me. The Government House Leader.

**Mr. Schow:** Mr. Speaker, as I sit here and listen to the words of the member who just spoke before me, I find it a bit rich – oh, am I out of time?

**The Acting Speaker:** The time has come to end debate on Bill 202.

I will recognize the Member for Sherwood Park to close debate.

**Mr. Kasawski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to close debate on Bill 202, the ethical governance act or, as we’re calling it, the No More Skyboxes Bill, and to speak plainly because Albertans deserve honesty about what is happening to their democracy.

Mr. Speaker, our democracy in Alberta is under attack not from some far-off adversary, not from abstract forces but from the UCP government, which has spent years chipping away at the very safeguards to keep our institutions honest and accountable. Why? Because the UCP are afraid; afraid of transparency, afraid of accountability, afraid of integrity, afraid of good governance. Over and over again we have watched this government demonstrate that they fear the light, that they fear any mechanism that gives Albertans visibility into how decisions are made, who influences those decisions, and who benefits from them. When a government fears transparency, that is when democracy begins to decay.

The fear is exactly why the UCP has embraced the notwithstanding clause with the enthusiasm of authoritarians. Something that should be a constitutional last resort has become for them a first impulse, a hammer to smash rights, silence critics, and

bulldoze public oversight. That is not democratic leadership; that is democratic backsliding.

And it's not just the rights of Albertans that they are undermining; it is the very institutions designed to protect those rights. Let's walk through the record. The Auditor General: let go, publicly undermined, and repeatedly underfunded. The Chief Electoral Officer: fired, removed without cause, and stripped of the resources needed to safeguard free and fair elections. The Ethics Commissioner: the role diluted, their authority constrained, and their warnings routinely ignored by the UCP. Mr. Speaker, it is not an accident. It is not a coincidence. It is not a misunderstanding. It is malice, and it is incompetence; a mixture that has become the defining political signature of the UCP government.

That is precisely why Bill 202 exists. Albertans do not trust this government anymore, and, frankly, why would they? If you want a symbol of that distrust, if you want a perfect example of corruption, influence, and the total abandonment of the public interest, you need not look further than the UCP's relentless obsession with opening the eastern slopes of the Canadian Rockies to coal mining. Albertans have been crystal clear. They do not want coal mining at the headwaters of their drinking water source; not ranchers, not municipalities, not First Nations, not everyday families.

Any government with the slightest respect for the democracy that we have would have simply restored the 1976 coal policy and ended the conversation, but this government refused. Why? Because foreign-owned coal companies wanted access, and the UCP listened to them, not Albertans. We now have an industry in decline that is making profit just off litigating with the government, and the only people that don't know it's in decline seem to be in the Premier's office. That is what happens when a government becomes too close to its donors, when it becomes too entangled with private interests and it cannot act in the public interest even when they are yelling from the rooftops.

That is why Bill 202 matters. It is not an attack on the government. It is a lifeline for the government and a chance to show Albertans that the UCP is capable of even a shred of respect for our democratic institutions.

Under UCP logic – I want Albertans to hear this clearly – the person who decides whether an MLA, a minister, or the ministerial staff can keep a lavish gift is the Premier's chief of staff, a partisan appointee, a political operative, someone whose first loyalty is to the Premier, not to the people of Alberta. That is the UCP's idea of ethical oversight. Mr. Speaker, it is absurd, it is indefensible, and, frankly, it is an embarrassment to this Assembly.

Bill 202 is a chance to end practices that no serious democracy would tolerate, a chance to modernize ethics laws, restore independence to oversight offices, and rebuild trust between Albertans and their elected representatives. If you oppose this bill – I am passing off this lifeline to you – your opposition to ethical governance will be remembered by voters. The people of this province know when they are being misled. They know when their institutions are being dismantled. They know when their democracy is being weakened. Bill 202 is a line in the sand, a choice between democratic accountability and political convenience, between strengthening democracy and eroding it.

3:30

I ask all members of this Assembly: please support Bill 202, and let's bring ethical governance, integrity, and transparency back to Alberta's Legislature.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:31 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Al-Guneid	Haji	Renaud
Arcand-Paul	Irwin	Shepherd
Boparai	Kasawski	Sigurdson, Lori
Deol	Kayande	Sweet
Eggen	Metz	Tejada
Elmeligi	Miyashiro	

Against the motion:

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

Totals:	For – 17	Against – 45
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[Motion for second reading of Bill 202 lost]

### Bill 203

#### Energy Storage Planning for Investment Act

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

**Ms Al-Guneid:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am proud to rise and speak in support of Bill 203, the Energy Storage Planning for Investment Act. Albertans have paid some of the highest electricity bills in Canada. Last year we all received that jarring emergency alert on our phones when Alberta's grid nearly failed, and that's unacceptable. When Alberta's grid came close to a blackout in January 2024, 190 megawatts of battery storage helped save the day. Well, energy storage works by storing low-cost energy when demand is low and releasing it when demand is high. Energy storage means more affordable energy and a more reliable grid for families and businesses.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

This bill is also about modernizing the grid, unlocking new investments, and creating jobs. You know, the UCP's chaotic and ideological policies have already chased away \$33 billion in renewable energy investment. This bill brings investment back into this province by telling global investors that we have stable policies around grid modernization and energy storage. Investor confidence means jobs in renewables, in battery manufacturing, and in critical minerals. This bill also means wealth creation within Indigenous communities. This bill requires Indigenous participation in energy storage projects through ensuring transparent, ongoing, and early consultations, Mr. Speaker. Bill 203 is a road map to improve reliability and affordability and to bring investment to Alberta. It also creates fairer market conditions for investment in energy storage.

3:50

You see, Mr. Speaker, due to legacy challenges in Alberta's electricity system energy storage has been historically charged transmission fees twice. For years it has been a double whammy that made this technology uneconomic for companies and for investors. For years energy storage facilities have been charged what we call demand transmission service, DTS, and supply transmission service, STS, because our legacy regulations treat energy storage as a load when charging the grid and as a generator when discharging energy. The reality is that energy storage is neither a load nor generation. It is a unique resource as per the legal definition provided in government Bill 22. That was an important bill that we also supported and voted for last session because it provided that important legal definition.

Now, I do acknowledge that the AESO has started resolving this double fee issue on storage through what the AESO calls demand opportunity service, or DOS, but this does not really resolve the problem fully and won't in the long term. Energy storage requires policy certainty through the creation of specific fees for this unique resource as per the definition of Bill 22. Bill 203 directs the ISO to fix legacy barriers in upcoming reviews and to reflect this uniqueness and reflect the full range of benefits of storing affordable energy, improving grid reliability, and even reducing environmental impacts. All this is about creating better market conditions so that energy storage can compete fairly and competitively in the market.

Bill 203 requires the government to develop a focused, co-ordinated plan to modernize Alberta's electricity system and to integrate more storage into the electricity grid. It also enables a new purchasing model called energy storage as a service. Energy storage as a service is a modern purchasing approach that enables regulated and deregulated operators to work together. It means that through this purchasing model idle batteries in regulated and deregulated entities can be shared when demand spikes. This will help keep the lights on and provide more affordable energy for Albertans while reducing red tape. That's something the minister of red tape would be onboard with, I think.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 also requires accountability and co-ordination among other ministries. This bill requires the government to be intentional and to ensure deliberate collaboration with the Technology and Innovation ministry to advance research and commercialization of long duration energy storage through an expert task force. This is storage that lasts for at least eight hours, which is not scalable at the moment. The Biden administration already allocated half a billion dollars in research to advance long duration energy storage.

This collaboration would require the involvement of Alberta Innovates, which is the government's arm for research and innovation. Now, unfortunately, in May 2025 the Ministry of Tech and Innovation gutted Alberta Innovates's budget by \$53 million. That's around 23 per cent by 2027. This agency supports Alberta in cutting-edge research that keeps Alberta competitive and provides advice and foresight on the future economy to the government, so it's truly unfortunate. The government should scale up innovation, Mr. Speaker, and not cut research and innovation funding.

This bill also requires a deliberate collaboration with the Energy and Minerals minister to secure critical minerals for battery supply chain in Alberta, and that's through expanding pilots and projects that extract lithium from oil waste water. We should be scaling up pilots on projects, Mr. Speaker. China is eating our lunch and dinner when it comes to critical minerals. We are so, so behind, and we know that critical minerals are of national interest. Alberta can play

a role in supporting Canada's energy security ambition and in reducing this vulnerability.

Mr. Speaker, why does this matter right now? Well, Albertans deserve a future-looking vision in the energy and electricity sectors. Albertans deserve better than paying some of the highest electricity bills in Canada. Albertans deserve better than getting emergency alerts because our grid almost failed. That was a wake-up call. Over the past six years Albertans have paid the price for the UCP government's ideological interventions in the power sector, and while our neighbours down south are investing heavily in energy storage, we are behind.

Texas alone has reached record numbers in energy storage. Texas is very similar to Alberta in the market – we're both oil and gas provinces – yet Texas now has 14,000 megawatts of operational battery storage and Alberta is at 271 megawatts, Mr. Speaker. The question is: why isn't the UCP government investing in grid modernization instead of ideologically driven decisions such as slamming the brakes on renewables and killing \$33 billion in investments and thousands of jobs? Even seeing the Premier invoking the sovereignty act and musings about electricity Crown corporations in the middle of redesigning a power market – Crown corps and deregulated markets don't go hand in hand.

We need a plan, Mr. Speaker. To fail to plan is a plan to fail. The reality is that Bill 203 cannot solve six years of UCP risky and ideological policies, but it provides focused and co-ordinated planning that can catch Alberta's grid up with every other province in our country while trying to fix legacy challenges and regulatory barriers in the system to create a vision for the future. We need pragmatic policies like this bill to enable a smarter, more modern, and more efficient electricity grid that will deliver more affordable energy and a more reliable grid while bringing on new investments and creating new jobs in Alberta.

I urge members opposite to support this bill. Vote for it. This is a good bill for Alberta that will help us modernize our electricity sector and shape the future for this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker:** If I could, I need the member to move second reading of the bill.

**Ms Al-Guneid:** Absolutely. With that, I move second reading for Bill 203, Mr. Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker:** Okay. Thank you.

I will recognize the Minister of Affordability and Utilities.

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 203, the Energy Storage Planning for Investment Act. I applaud and appreciate the member opposite's efforts and intention behind producing and tabling legislation like this. I know exactly how much work and effort goes into producing legislation of this complexity. In fact, my ministry has brought forward numerous pieces of legislation over the last number of years: Bill 19, Bill 22, Bill 52, and more coming within the next week. This legislation includes work that directly advances the deployment of energy storage within Alberta, making Bill 203 redundant. If it had been tabled two years ago, it may have been timely and added storage to our grid. In reality, Bill 203 will slow down the immense progress we have made and are continuing to make in advancing energy storage within our province.

Bill 22, the Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022, focused on modernizing Alberta's electrical grid by integrating new technologies like energy storage. The electricity statutes amendment act was introduced specifically to unleash Alberta's rapidly growing battery

energy storage industry. It did this by adding the definition, as the member opposite noted, of energy storage and including it alongside generation in everything from the Electric Utilities Act to the Alberta Utilities Commission Act. This legislation advanced nonwire solutions, utilizing batteries to retrieve and relieve transmission congestion across the grid and limit system curtailment and otherwise underutilized energy from intermittent sources like wind and solar, the very thing this bill is trying to do two years later.

In fact, in Bill 52 we furthered that. In the Energy and Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, our government streamlined the procurement of ancillary services for the management of transmission constraints, which is why in that time frame we have seen, despite what was said, a further 2,280 megawatts of solar, renewable energy, brought to our grid; a further 662 megawatts of wind brought to our grid; another 1,270 megawatts, on top of the 3,000 megawatts previous to that, of dispatchable energy brought to our grid. In fact, we have an amazing 20 megawatts of hydroelectricity approved to be built within the province since that time. And you know what we did for storage? We saw 1,267 megawatts of storage added to our grid. That is nearly – anybody paying attention? – a 670 per cent increase from what was already there. On top of that, we have an additional 426 megawatts coming after that last round of approval that is being studied right now. This is tremendous growth.

4:00

I know the member opposite mentioned Texas having 14,000 megawatts of storage. In a system that's 140,000 megawatts large, that's roughly 10 per cent. With our new numbers we're at 20 per cent of storage coming to our grid. We are doing better than Texas in relative size.

In addition to this tool, the tool of ancillary services, we have what's called FFR, or Fast Frequency Response, a form of ancillary service that is crucial to maintaining the health and reliability of our electrical grid. Without sufficient levels of FFR in the event of a severe outage the consequences could be immense – hence the alert from a few years ago – which is precisely why we acted this past spring and brought in the Energy and Utilities Statutes Amendment Act.

It has already been determined by the technical experts at our independent system operator that battery energy storage projects are the best providers of Fast Frequency Response. That is why right now our Alberta Electric System Operator, or AESO, is undertaking the largest competitive procurement of FFR in the province's history, another 750 megawatts of FFR. We are meeting the needs today, and this will add the correct type, the correct number, and the correct location of additional battery storage projects brought to the grid by private investment.

This is a crucial difference between what the Member for Calgary-Glenmore has proposed and what our government is already doing. The member's bill, unfortunately, requires a lengthy top-down and highly politicized process for battery procurement that would directly drive up costs and all but guarantee key technical requirements are missed through a legislated task force. It would also legislatively command the minister to interfere with the independence of our private market and the Alberta Electric System Operator and the Alberta Utilities Commission.

While these are extremely problematic, this bill would also substantially delay the progress of adding new battery storage on our grid. In fact, Bill 203 requires the creation of a task force which would "provide its report to the Minister within 2 years of establishment," pushing off a further two years the work that we are seeing right now. Mr. Speaker, we do not have time to wait another

two years for another report from a government-appointed task force to act. We have nearly 40 per cent intermittent generation on our grid today, and the time to act was yesterday, which is exactly what we did.

The member opposite and I share the belief that we need new battery storage projects to connect to our grid, and I'm happy to say that this is happening. It has been approved. What we do not share is the belief that lengthy top-down, government-directed interference into a private, competitive market will get us there any faster, any more affordably, or will serve the people of Alberta in any way, shape, or form.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For all of these reasons and the facts provided, I ask all of my fellow members in this Assembly to not support Bill 203. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** You're so welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

**Member Kayande:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 203, Energy Storage Planning for Investment Act. This is a good bill. It's about reducing electricity prices for Albertans. Now, I just did a little bit of math on my most recent electricity bill and found that I was paying over 22 cents a kilowatt hour all in, which is significantly more than somebody would pay in Texas, significantly more than somebody would pay, I believe, in California. It is a shocking – shocking – number to pay for something we need so much in a cold climate like the one that we have.

So how does energy storage reduce the cost of electricity? Well, it does it by reducing the peak price. It does increase the off-peak price, but the funny thing is that people tend to use more electricity during the peaks. That's why it's very expensive. I appreciate the comment from the minister – I actually misspoke when I said that Alberta electricity prices were higher than they are in California; they're not. They are higher than Texas, though, and they're higher, I believe, than most other places in Canada. And they're unaffordable. That's the important thing. Our electricity prices are unaffordable for Albertans.

This bill is also about creating jobs. It is impossible to calculate the damage that this government created by banning renewable energy investments. In banning renewable energy investments, it not only banned solar and wind, which was the target, but it banned batteries and it banned geothermal, which is bonkers. All of those activities were banned. They were only brought back as the entire environment for electricity investment is now in a wait-and-see model while the new electricity market is being redesigned. It meant that stuff fell off the queue.

And while the minister is great at taking credit for projects that were currently under construction over the last couple of years, the minister also knows full well that these are very long projects to actually procure. When you come up with an idea, you have to go to the transmission authority. You have to get into the interconnection queue in order to get connected, and that takes years for the transmission studies to happen. So once you're through the queue, I agree; projects were completed. We don't know what the next five years of projects will look like with the amount of uncertainty that this government has deliberately created.

Now, the other thing the minister has talked about is FFR procurement. I mean, fantastic. You know, the FFR procurement reminds me a little bit of the plan to, like, spend \$8 billion on schools, whenever that happens. Kids are struggling now. Kids need classrooms now. We're paying more for electricity now, and

we can't wait for a procurement project. The minister himself said that we can't wait.

So why does this bill help with energy storage, and why does it help with battery storage today? Battery storage projects can actually get up and running very quickly. Where battery storage already exists right now, because of the dual tariff that they face, they are not being utilized to their full capability. This will solve that problem.

I'm going back a little bit into my history as having been somebody who actually worked for a natural gas storage startup. I was employee 3 way, way, way back in 2007. You never heard about it because the project failed, as projects often do. The funny thing about natural gas storage hooked into the Alberta natural gas transmission system is that storage is neither billed for supply nor billed for demand. In fact, storage is seen as a resource that helps the entire natural gas grid work better. The same thing is true for energy storage.

I know that if natural gas storage had had to pay both supply and demand charges, it would not have been economical. It would not have been worth it for private investors to build even a single gigajoule of storage capacity. Similarly, I can see how, simply by reducing effective revenue from buying low, selling high, having to pay the supply and demand charges in between takes the spread away, and it reduces the ability to build these projects.

#### 4:10

I want to acknowledge the Member for Calgary-Glenmore on her excellent overview of how storage works. I want to talk just a little bit about the economics of it in terms of providing liquidity. In financial markets as well there's a tendency for financial markets sometimes to lock up when you're trying to buy into a rising price environment or sell into a falling price environment. The same thing happens with energy in that when prices are low, what you want is a load to show up and pull some of those megawatts in to increase the price at those low points. That's better for generators. It's better for generator profitability.

At the same time, by providing that energy that is stored at the high points when people are actually using the electricity, when they come home from work, start the dishwasher, start the washing machine, start cooking, kick in the furnace – that's when you need to provide lower cost energy that has been stored over that time frame. In so doing, you not only increase profitability for generators; you lower costs for ordinary electricity ratepayers, who are, after all, the people who voted for us. This is why it works.

The other thing that battery storage can do – and I'm very glad the minister mentioned ancillary services. What ancillary services are is – it's weird because not only do you need to make sure that the grid completely balances, that there's supply going in and demand coming out at exactly the right time, but you've got to make sure that the pulls that are occurring over seconds and very short one-minute periods are actually able to be handled as well. Like, if a large generator suddenly trips off, then you need to start having a supply that's available right at that time without a grid alert and without the lights flickering.

These are known as – there are many different forms of ancillary services. A couple of them batteries are ideally designed to supply. They come under weird names like reg up and reg down. Reg up means frequency regulation up. If the frequency of the system is a little bit low, it brings it up a bit. If the frequency of the system is a little bit high, it brings it down a little bit. These are the sorts of things that batteries are actually very conversant at doing. They don't need a separate, massive government top-down procurement process in order to do it. They just need a market to function properly.

That's all that this bill is asking for. Let the storage market work. Let investors come in and put their money to work. Somehow over six years of UCP government Alberta has become a difficult place to do business because this government demands that any investment actually meet some sort of an ideological hurdle as well as a financial hurdle. Everything that they're accusing the Canadian federal government of – and, boy, there's a lot to accuse them of – is actually also being done by this government. Somebody wanting to put a solar panel in place has to now get ideological approval for that in addition to the financial approval that they would have already required from their own risk process. It's not okay.

That's the final thing about why this bill is good and why it's important. This bill will create jobs. This bill will develop additional storage technologies, which Alberta needs more than any other place in the world because the sun doesn't shine all that much in winter. We can use our hydroelectric dams, for example. We could use our geothermal. We could use other, you know, like, hot salt systems in order to keep energy stored for long periods of time. This is going to create a technology advantage here in Alberta, and it's going to create jobs, good-paying jobs, for Albertans. Lower electricity prices create jobs. Those are the things that this bill does. That's why it's a good bill, and that's why I'll be supporting it.

Thank you.

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

**Ms de Jonge:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak in opposition to Bill 203, the Energy Storage Planning for Investment Act. This bill claims to encourage the speedy adoption of battery energy storage assets to Alberta's grid. Unfortunately, that is far from accurate. Bill 203 does little more than demonstrate the opposition's consistent failure to understand this file and their preference for the type of cumbersome central planning that would only slow the process. On this side of the House we recognize that it's the market that's going to determine the most efficient, effective, and beneficial allocation of resources on our grid. That's why our government has been working tirelessly for years now to strengthen Alberta's private, energy-only electricity market, in clear contrast with the opposition's preference for onerous central planning.

This is a preference that's fully revealed in this bill, which I think is a very poetic illustration of the NDP's inability to understand our electricity market and their incapability of making decisions that would strengthen the future of our grid. Our government has been working and has advanced numerous policies that have encouraged the private market's adoption of battery energy storage resources.

I have to commend the Minister of Affordability and Utilities for all his great work on this file. Bill 22 and Bill 52, two pieces of legislation that the minister brought forward just in the past few years, have directly enabled greater adoption of grid-scale battery storage projects in Alberta. The minister talked a bit about this as well. Bill 22 defined energy storage alongside other generation assets and carved the path for batteries as a non-wire solution, supporting progress towards lowering transmission costs while better utilizing intermittent renewable energy.

Bill 52 enabled the restructured energy market and transmission changes, which directly encourage the greater adoption of battery energy storage projects to our grid. Batteries can play multiple central roles in ensuring the reliability and affordability of our electrical grid. They can act as non-wire solutions that relieve congestion on our transmission system, and they also act as fast frequency response, or FFR, which ensures the health of our grid

when we are caught off guard by sudden outages which threaten the integrity of our infrastructure.

The members opposite may know that right now the AESO is undergoing an FFR plus procurement process. The minister mentioned this, that they're seeking the rapid deployment of up to 750 megawatts of new energy storage capacity to the grid. That would represent hundreds of millions of dollars of investment in Alberta. All of this is in addition to the restructured energy market this government is implementing, which would strengthen and would encourage the private market's ability to provide stable, reliable, and affordable electricity for the grid.

The REM is going to encourage that stability and that reliability, and battery energy storage can provide these factors in a grid where nearly a third – nearly a third – of our installed capacity consists of intermittent renewables. Consistently, private battery energy storage companies have endorsed REM as, and this is important, they recognize, better than any central planning committee could, that our government's policies directly encourage the adoption of new, cutting-edge technology that they are ready to build.

Madam Speaker, it's abundantly clear from each amendment proposed in Bill 203 that the opposition really should never be in a position again to influence the direction of Alberta's electricity system. This government is entirely committed to our private market, which provides competitive electricity costs for decades, compared to other provinces, despite our lack of hydroelectric capacity.

When the NDP had their brief stint in government, they were prepared to completely destroy our private, energy-only market and bring in an uncompetitive capacity market, which would have inevitably led our province towards an inefficient, centrally planned, and overly expensive public utility. That would have ended Alberta's competitive advantage in the electricity space. Bill 203 just shows that they've learned nothing since we've scrapped their terrible plans for a capacity market in this province.

Bill 203 states that the purpose of the act would "require the Government to engage in coordinated planning," and goes on to use the word "plan" or "planning" 20 times in the bill, including in its name. I'm proud to say that our government rejects the idea that central planning by a government-appointed committee is the best way to organize an economy.

For decades, Madam Speaker, Albertans have been exceptionally well-served by the competitive, private electricity market, which has thrived in this province. All the work we are doing in our ministry is in pursuit of strengthening this private market and preparing it for the future where numerous cutting-edge technologies, including energy storage, are ready to deploy and begin providing power for Albertans. If the NDP had it their way, all of this progress would grind to a complete halt in favour of appointing friends, extreme environmentalists, ideological allies to government panels to make decisions wholly out of touch with realities on the ground.

4:20

Throughout Bill 203 the NDP would have us legislate timelines that would supposedly enable energy storage. Right now, as the minister said, this government's reforms to Alberta's electricity market have the system operator actively pursuing and incentivizing the deployment of new energy storage resources in the province; 750 megawatts. That would represent hundreds of millions of dollars of investment. To the members here: you may know, 750 megawatts is enough to power most of the city of Calgary. Bill 203, if passed, would in effect halt this progress and pass the reins off to an extreme environmentalist task force.

The bill goes on to legislate the government's every move when it comes to the deployment of energy storage: who we must consult with, how we must structure our various central plans, what the definition of a task force is, when we must do each piece down to the prescribed dates, what we can and cannot consider in the process of developing these plans, and on and on and on.

**An Hon. Member:** Lack of innovation.

**Ms de Jonge:** Yeah.

Madam Speaker, the only thing missing from this overly pedantic bill is time for the minister to sneeze.

The NDP's obsession with creating centrally planned committees is ironically weakened by their ideological need for top-down tinkering to such a degree that the very creation of this proposed task force is paralyzed by this obnoxiously prescriptive legislation. Bill 203 specifically determines who should be on this energy task force, and that includes two people who are researchers or experts in energy storage from academic or technical institutions in Alberta and one person from think tanks or other public policy research organizations dedicated to energy innovation in Canada.

Madam Speaker, when these personnel requirements were written into the bill it is clear that the NDP had certain people in mind from certain organizations as their ideal members for this task force, namely the Member for Calgary-Glenmore's former employers, environmental extremists, and ideological allies who think themselves far better at determining the direction of our electricity system than market forces that have made Alberta a bastion of an entrepreneurial competitive spirit in this country, which is otherwise weighed down to the point of economic despair by similar plans and task forces developed by left-wing governments in Ottawa and provincial capitals across the country.

Madam Speaker, as long as I have the privilege to stand in this House, I will fight against the same economic sickness and ensure it is not spread to our great province. We will continue to protect and strengthen Alberta's private energy-only market. So long as the UCP is in government, we are not going to let the NDP devastate this province any more than they already have.

With that, I encourage all members of this House to vote against Bill 203. Thank you.

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

**Ms Sweet:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise in support of Bill 203, the Energy Storage Planning for Investment Act. I, first off, just find it really interesting that the government's whole argument against this bill is that it wants to create a task force, and then we hear the minister get up and say that task forces are bad while the government is literally creating a task force for education right now to analyze what we can do in education. That's fun.

But also fun is that in 2020 the current government, UCP, all the things, created a task force, and that task force was called the electricity billing task force. Oh, fun fact. The government was like: "We need to go out and we need to talk to people about the electricity markets and how they feel things are going because we know we have one of the most expensive jurisdictions when it comes to electricity. We want to make sure that Albertans understand and we can fix the problem, so let's create a task force." All right. We're in agreement then that when it comes to electricity and talking to Albertans and figuring out plans and doing consultation, a task force works because the government has already done it. In fact, they didn't do anything with the recommendations that came out of that task force because if they did, we wouldn't be here right now.

In 2020 it happened, and so I would encourage the government to go back in history and learn from their mistakes and recognize the fact that they didn't do the things that needed to get done that Albertans told them to do when they created their own task force. So their argument doesn't fly because they did it, and if it's good for them to do it, then this bill is also a good thing to do.

Now, the government said, and the minister also said when he stood up: "We've been working on things, and we've been doing stuff, and this is going to take too long. This is going to take two years if we do a task force, and we can do things between now and then." Then he spoke about how in 2022 he introduced a bill for energy storage. And then what happened in 2024? We had an alert because we didn't have enough storage and we didn't have enough electricity, two years later from when the minister first introduced his bill in 2022. So that argument also does not work because it is taking this government years and years and years to do the work that needs to get done.

During January 2024 we had a cold snap. Albertans were terrified; it was, like, minus 30. Thankfully we did have some storage capacity that was able to provide a lifeline. Not enough, but it helped with rolling blackouts. But we still had to have rolling blackouts, so there is a need for more.

Now, the other thing that was very interesting is that the minister then said, "Well, we introduced a bill in '25 to add grid capacity and to be able to look at more storage," except then they introduced the moratorium and made it almost so confusing that companies didn't even know what they were allowed to invest in, what the market looked like, and what the potential opportunities have been.

I've been consulting over the last few years with many companies who just don't get whether it's a ban. The government says it was never a ban; it was just a moratorium. Well, what does that even mean? The market didn't understand and didn't know. They didn't know where they were allowed to go and explore. They didn't know what municipalities they could work with. They didn't know what the requirements were going to be. Only recently have we been able to get to a point where there's a little bit of clarity, but still a ton of confusion, about what will actually be approved and what won't be approved. So really what has happened is that this government has created so much confusion in the market and so much uncertainty that people don't feel like this is even a good place to invest. That is a problem.

Now, we have hemorrhaged, I would say, around \$30 billion in energy investment since the UCP brought this moratorium in on renewables; \$30 billion. What Bill 203 would do, if this government chose to pass it, is send a clear message from our province to the business community that we have a modern, stable, and ready-to-lead energy innovation. It will reassure investors that we're open for business. Or the government could vote it down, and we can continue down the same uncertainty path that we are currently on where nobody really understands and nobody really knows what's going on.

Now, the other piece that's so important about this bill is that it is actually a job creator. The reality of it is that the government will stand up and say: well, we're doing all these great things with jobs. We're not. We are still behind on youth employment. Our economy has slowed down, and this is a job creator with potential to retrain and/or train into up-and-coming economies. We know this because when the economy slowed down when we were in government, this is part of the reason why we accelerated our green energy projects. It was because people working in the trades, who were working in oil and gas, weren't able to work in those fields because the oil and gas sector had come to such a slowdown. We were retraining people into green energy, and then they were getting jobs and they were

working in those fields. This is a job creator, and it can be done if the government will get onboard.

4:30

If we look at energy storage, it could be a cornerstone industry for our province. We could be leaders, we could be the innovators, and we could be the marketers to other sectors across the country. I'm glad that the government is agreeing with me. Then you can agree with signing off and voting in favour of the bill. [interjection] There are no interventions during private members' business.

The other thing is that it's critical mineral processing. We have a ton of critical minerals in this province. We have an opportunity to be looking at those minerals, to be value-adding those minerals here in the province, and even potentially creating a secondary economy. But, again, if we're not willing to be innovators and we're not able to be forward thinkers, and it can't be something that came forward by the opposition – heaven forbid we work together and the government actually bring on a good idea – then we aren't those innovators. That's part of the problem.

Then, of course – I mean, this is an ongoing conversation – battery manufacturing: great job creator, the ability to be able to do that. People are willing to come here. That then goes back to our critical minerals. Honestly, they're just really good-paying jobs, so why we would be slowing it down and not being part of that doesn't make any sense to me.

Now, the other thing that I thought was really interesting . . . [interjection] The minister keeps saying: two years; two years. I keep hearing him across the floor. Again, the task force that the government created in 2020 also took – well, we're still waiting for the results from that task force to actually be implemented to bring down the power bills for Albertans. The task force was created under the government, and Albertans are still paying the highest bills in the province. The task force is now – we're what, 2025? – five years later, and we're still waiting. So the government can talk about two years, two years. We've had, like, three energy bills come into this Chamber since 2022, yet still electricity prices are the highest. The problem hasn't been solved. I'll just say three years later and we're still waiting for the government to fix the problem. The argument just doesn't stand.

It's a great argument in the sense that we want to deflect and be like: oh, well, the NDP wants to take two years. Well, it's been three. Why are Albertans still paying some of the highest energy prices in the country? Why are people still on RROs and not being able to transfer to lower bills? Why has that problem not been fixed? Why has the issue around credit rating being the primary driver for electricity bills not been fixed by this government? Easy solutions exist, but we're five years later.

There are things this government can do. They want to talk about ideology, but, really, to me this is ideology. You don't vote in favour of the opposition's bills just because it's the opposition. Like, that's exactly what's happening right now. The work that this bill does isn't actually existing, and the government will say that people on the opposition's side don't know what they're doing. You've got to be kidding me. One of the members just quoted my colleague's employer when she worked in this field. Like . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

**Mr. Deol:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to speak to support Bill 203, a private member's bill, the bill by the opposition member, Energy Storage Planning for Investment Act. When I'm looking at this bill, you know, I cannot do anything but commend my colleague who brought forward this bill to not only support Albertans but, given what is happening in this House, the

practice being seen from the UCP government of fake promises and rhetoric without real outcomes. By proposing real solutions to the issues, the government members can not only listen to a lot of things they already know, but they have an opportunity to support something that can help everyday Albertans.

Madam Speaker, the issue of utilities bills and electricity bills, gas bills is one of the hot topics in my constituency and my riding. This is the issue that has existed since I took the office as a member of the Legislature for Edmonton-Meadows. The very first thing the UCP government did: they actually made changes to remove the utility caps and made changes to the energy sectors. Utility bills rose five volts, and my office was flooded by complaints from constituents, by parents, seniors, nonprofits, small businesses, or community organizations. They were saying, you know, that they are even afraid of opening their bills every month because every time they see a bill, they just kind of see shocking news. How are they going to afford it?

Not only that; I remember that I went to one radio talk show. The host opened the talk show lines for the public to participate. The fellow called in and he said, you know, that his credit cards are full, he cannot afford any longer paying utility bills this high, and he's calling to his company to accommodate and provide him a grace period to catch up. The answer received from the service provider was to wear hoodies if you cannot afford the electricity bills or gas bills.

Not only that; in the last six years we have seen a lot of challenges. Even if we are talking about just the past year, the people seeing their cellphone suddenly lighting up and having a great light, specifically during the time of the blackouts. Then the people were experiencing deep freezing weather, extreme cold weather, at the time when they need the heat and the light, heavily rely specifically on heat the most in the year, and they were scared. They were scared with the messages that they might lose electricity power; they might lose the lights during that time.

The UCP government in these six years have had so many opportunities. The minister of affordability could not even, you know, contradict even a single time in the House that this is not the top issue to Albertans but failed to come up with a solution that provides Albertans with relief. This very bill not only addresses the issue of modernizing our grids, the storage capacity but also some of the austerity, I can call it, that Albertans suffer due to the lack of vision by this UCP government when they called a moratorium. Two years ago when they came back to the office, the first thing they called was a moratorium on renewables. The province not only lost investment but also lost so many jobs.

4:40

This bill is, you know, providing very reasonable offers to the UCP government. They are giving them choice. I am hearing from the government side private members: they are not concerned about how this bill will support the province to modernize the grid and build more capacity and provide reliable services to Albertans, but they are more worried about how their insiders or private actors will be impacted if we move on this. This is shameful.

With these comments, you know, I will encourage all members of this House to look at what our province is going through when we are talking about electricity bills. This is a very wise proposal by my colleague, and I would encourage everyone to support Bill 203.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Dyck:** Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Today is a good day. On this beautiful Monday I want to speak to this bill. Thank you so very much to the minister and also the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore for just speaking so strongly and clearly on this. It's always great to have great, thoughtful colleagues that are brilliant on this side of the House. They've done great work, and we'll continue to see that on this side of the House.

Now, Madam Speaker, we have in this bill some big challenges. Not only does this bill add bureaucracy to the conversation – this bureaucracy just adds layers upon layers of red tape – but part of this red tape is slowing down innovation. Recently I've been able to speak with a few people doing battery storage in Alberta, and their requests weren't to throw in old rules and create more red tape for themselves but to allow them to run. This is what we're doing already on this side of the House. We're doing great work in order for us to responsibly expand our energy market and be able to have power for the future.

Now, not only this, but these providers are doing great work, and I want to commend them for this. But this bill, as the minister said, adds two years of wait time. We have innovators in Alberta looking to pursue and expand this today using some of the best technology and expand on that. Why would we wait, Madam Speaker? Making them wait an extra two years, falling behind, putting our tech infrastructure behind: we don't want that. We want to be able to move ahead, and that's what this side of the House is all about.

I also want to correct the record on a few things that the member opposite was mentioning on some pricing. Texas all in is 16 cents USD, but if you do the conversion, that's 23 cents Canadian. Here in Alberta it's 22 cents all in. Madam Speaker, I don't know if he knows how to do math, but that's more money than it is here in Alberta. Also, in California it's 54 cents USD. That is over double. So let's take a real look at the numbers, do some conversions, and start talking in the same numbers here.

Not only that, but he's also talking about the Canadian systems across different provinces. We're the only province not carrying utility debt. Every other province is carrying significant utility debt, which is funded by taxpayers, Madam Speaker. This is a significant difference. We're the only ones not subsidizing the cost of power and the production of power across all of Canada. We have a market that people are willing to engage in. We have cheaper power than Texas, far cheaper power than California, yet they're arguing to slow down the market. They're trying to slow down industry. They're trying to slow down innovation. I would encourage this entire House not to vote for this bill simply on the fact that we need innovation to continue to move forward and for Albertan innovators to continue to be able to embrace the market we have and the market we're moving into.

To just wrap up, Madam Speaker, we on this side of the House want to see continual investment. As the minister spoke, we're seeing continual investment, and I look forward to seeing more investment here in the future as well.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

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

**Member Miyashiro:** Thanks, Madam Speaker. I appreciate this. After hearing the last two debates from my colleagues across the aisle, I just kind of threw my stuff out the window because I just want to address a few things. Where do I start? I have limited time.

One of the interesting things is that the Member for Calgary-Glenmore, that is proposing this amendment, actually is an expert in renewable energy, but you know, let's just call that down and make fun of that. She actually has expertise in this bill, which she authored.

**Ms de Jonge:** Do you want to hire her boss?

**Member Miyashiro:** Oh, yeah. Yeah. Sure. Why don't you have a debate with her personally? Let's see who wins that one. It would be pretty ugly.

You know what? I'll tell you why these people, as in the government MLAs, should vote in favour of this. It speaks directly to their mantra of Alberta as an energy superpower. It creates a more reliable electricity grid. It makes things more affordable for Albertans. Alberta needs pragmatic policies like this to enable a smarter, more modern, more efficient grid that delivers affordable energy and reliability while bringing new investments and new jobs. That's what these guys talk about all the time, too, whether it's true or not from their mouths.

Albertans pay the highest electricity prices in the country, and why is that, Madam Speaker? Well, this government is in control of electricity, so there's always that. They blame everybody and everything for this except for themselves. Let's recall a few things. This government chased away investment in the renewables sector in 2023 with its moratorium and followed that with some really targeted, unfair rules against the sector, which halted renewables investments and made sure that renewables investors didn't return.

There's been one 58-megawatt project in Alberta since 2023. Prior to that Alberta accounted for 92 per cent of Canada's renewables. The loss of this investment – because we like to talk about jobs here as well. That's \$33 billion in lost investment and more than 24,000 job-years. This renewables-phobic government costs municipalities important revenue every year. Municipalities collect \$70 million in tax revenue from existing renewables projects, but sustainable growth for municipalities is stalled without any new project starts.

You know, I spoke with many councillors at the RMA who expressed their concerns over this government's position on renewables. Prior to the 2023 UCP moratorium one rural municipality was able to take advantage of a more favourable renewables investment environment to attract several large solar projects. They were in line for more projects, but then the "renewables are bad" rules were implemented. Sixty per cent of taxation from that municipality comes from renewables. Cardston county, if you recall, had a large solar installation cancelled due to this UCP government. Millions of dollars in investments and real jobs were lost for that.

I heard a couple of members opposite talking about technology and how, you know, this would stifle technology. One of the things that this bill would do is that it requires collaboration between ministries, like utilities and tech, to create this expert task force. Do you know what the task force is for? It's not just to dream of new things. It's to deal with advances in research and long duration energy storage. That's it. That's what the task force is for. It's not to dream up new things. It's actually to make things better. It's to look at batteries that store energy for at least eight hours at a time.

4:50

You know what's interesting, too, Madam Speaker? Alberta Innovates is an agency under the Ministry of Technology and Innovation, and in May of this year this government gutted Alberta Innovates's budget by 53 per cent. Now, this budget supports cutting-edge research that keeps Alberta competitive and provides advice and foresight on the future economy to the ministry. The government should be scaling up innovation, not cutting out research and innovation funding.

The other co-ordination that we have to look at for these things, Madam Speaker, is the ability to put the storage where the production is. I think that's one of the things that the members opposite were talking about: we don't need more transmission lines.

What it means is that you're storing it where it's produced, right? You're not charging this in/out, like they're charging now. You reduce the need for wire upgrades. You include demand-side management, energy storage, and distributed energy resources, and it creates fairer market conditions for energy storage and energy distribution.

Madam Speaker, I'm going to give my colleagues a chance to speak to this as well, and I thank you for your time.

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

**Mr. Kasawski:** Thanks, Madam Speaker. I really appreciate the debate that's come here, but what I heard loud and clear from the government side is that we're not going to support Bill 203 today, but we're going to take it back and we'll bring it forward, probably as a red tape reduction bill, in the future. That seems to be the pattern that comes from this government. Good ideas are in this bill, so I applaud the Member for Calgary-Glenmore for bringing forward this bill.

A lot of spin came from the other side as well. I just want to remind – you know, I do recall a couple of things that the member said that I do want to bring back. I think it was the Member for Grande Prairie who said that it's so great that in Alberta, all in, electricity costs are 22 cents a kilowatt hour now. I can't believe that is a bragging point for this government. Like, way to go. Five cents a kilowatt hour with maybe distribution and the 3 to 5 cents was a pretty good deal back in the good old days, but 22 cents: let's take a victory lap on that. I'm glad that's the UCP position now, that they're doing great at 22 cents a kilowatt hour all in.

I also love the emphasis on markets, how you've just got to let the market do its thing. I can't believe how many times on this side of the House the New Democrats have had to defend the opportunity and the ability of markets to do their thing and to stop gaming from some corporations, but wasn't it fascinating in November 2023 – I think it was in one of those sovereignty acts – when the Premier suggested that we should have a Crown corporation that could be a generator of last resort. The government was actually standing up the idea of being generators in our competitive generation market. I mean, it's fascinating now that it feels like on that side maybe the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore either forgets that or wants to project that she is pro market, but in the past this government has come out as very antimarket.

I do want to recall also what the Member for Calgary-Elbow said. This is a difficult place to do business. This government has made it a difficult place to do business, so it's a pleasure to rise today in strong support of private member's Bill 203, and I do want to commend the Member for Calgary-Glenmore for bringing forward a bill that recognizes something that Albertans already know, that the electricity system of the future will depend on flexibility, innovation, resilience, and smart planning, and energy storage is central to all of it.

It's Alberta's opportunity to lead. Bill 203 presents a real opportunity for Alberta to step forward as a leader in one of the fastest growing energy sectors in the world, energy storage. It's not a niche technology anymore, Madam Speaker. Around the world jurisdictions are building out batteries, pumped hydro, thermal storage, flywheels, compressed air, a full tool kit of technologies that stabilize power grids, enhance reliability, and support diverse energy systems.

Madam Speaker, in the past when I was just learning about energy storage, I did connect the fact that in Nisku, Alberta, we are very good at building high-pressure vessels that could be used to

hold compressed air, and why couldn't they be at a place where we could manufacture technology for energy storage?

The real story is that Alberta must seize this economic opportunity, not what has been spun over on the other side. I encourage them to look at the bill, read through the details, find out how to incorporate it into government policy. It's projected to be a multibillion-dollar industry if it's not already a multibillion-dollar industry globally, and Alberta has every competitive advantage to build, deploy, and export these technologies. We just have to become a good place to do business. We have to stop shutting down industry, we have to stop putting up obstacles, and we have to create opportunities because here, if we have a place that is open to storage, we have all of the players in a marketplace that would love to deploy it and build out more reliability in our system for a good rate of return.

We have world-class engineers, a deep pool of skilled tradespeople, a manufacturing sector ready for new markets, and entrepreneurial culture that thrives on innovation. Bill 203 signals that Alberta wants to be not just a consumer of energy storage but a builder, designer, and exporter, Madam Speaker. That is how we grow a future-proof economy, by building on our strengths and creating new energy industries that can employ Albertans for decades. Jobs, jobs, jobs. Bill 203, Madam Speaker: jobs, jobs, jobs.

I want to emphasize one thing clearly. Energy storage creates jobs. Skilled trades jobs, engineering jobs, construction jobs, technology jobs, software and maintenance jobs, mining jobs, rural jobs and urban jobs, manufacturing jobs: when we build new storage facilities, battery banks, hybrid renewable storage plants, industrial-scale installations, small distribution-scale installations, we are putting Albertans to work. Bill 203 is being proposed to this House as an opportunity to create jobs for Albertans, and it should be welcomed and encouraged to have debate that is supportive of it.

We want to build a policy environment that attracts investors and puts Alberta on the map, not Alberta on the map for having 22-cents-a-kilowatt-hour retail electricity; Alberta on the map for being a place that's great to invest and build capital projects. We want to create the conditions for companies to manufacture components or build full systems here in Alberta. We want to support our local manufacturers, give them the opportunity to deploy here, and then allow them to go and thrive in other parts of the world. That is a model of success that has followed throughout the world. Support your local manufacturers and builders so that they can compete around the world. It's not speculative. It's happening right now in jurisdictions across Alberta, and Alberta should be in that race. Bill 203 helps ensure that we are.

Why planning matters? A lot has been made about the government's task force, which they've put up a lot of. They've decided now they're going to put up a task force to study classroom complexity, but the idea of putting up a task force to study one of the most complex things in our environment, electricity? That seems like a good idea, Madam Speaker. So to talk about how it could take up to two years: only if they drag their feet on it. They could be wrapped up within a few months if they were to chase after the opportunity presented by Bill 203, to chase after the opportunity in energy storage.

The heart of Bill 203 is straightforward. Alberta needs a clear, coherent planning framework so that energy storage can be built strategically, efficiently, and cost effectively. Right now the need exists, the technology exists, the investors are waiting, but the planning framework is not yet where it needs to be. Bill 203 helps fix that.

Good planning gives investors certainty, something they have been longing for from Alberta, a place where they have some certainty in this incoherent world. It gives grid operators flexibility,

gives communities clarity, and gives ratepayers better value. Madam Speaker, let's support Bill 203.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, the time allotted for consideration of this has concluded for today.

### 5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

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

#### Automobile Insurance

504. Mr. Ip moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to address skyrocketing automobile insurance premiums by indexing the automobile insurance rate cap by annually adjusting the cap based on the percentage change in the all-items consumer price index, CPI, for Alberta published by Statistics Canada.

**Mr. Ip:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm bringing this motion forward because Alberta is in the middle of an affordability crisis, and auto insurance has become emblematic and a symbol of that crisis with mounting costs and no end in sight. That's what this motion is about, how to support Albertans struggling under a cost-of-living crisis created by this government.

Across my riding of Edmonton-South West and, frankly, across Alberta if you talk to any everyday Albertan, any Albertan on the street, you'll hear that they're feeling the squeeze from every direction. Groceries remain expensive, rent and mortgage costs have climbed, utilities are unpredictable, and in that storm of rising costs auto insurance stands out, you know, as a cost that keeps on growing but never feels like it's delivering more value or more security. Just this morning I was talking to Aidan Moore and Lani Eslava, students who live in my riding of Edmonton-South West who pay thousands of dollars in insurance a year: Aidan, who pays \$4,600, more than what his truck is worth, and Lani, who, despite driving for more than four years and having a clean record, pays \$3,900 and whose car insurance has tripled since she started driving.

Consider this, Madam Speaker. The Alberta Automobile Insurance Rate Board reports that Alberta drivers pay amongst the highest premiums in Canada. AIRB data shows the average premium for Alberta in 2023 was about \$1,669, second only to Ontario, and AIRB in other summaries of its market data continues to place Alberta at the top nationally. Albertans spend amongst the highest share of after-tax income on auto insurance. Keep in mind that those are provincial averages. The reality is that people in Calgary and Edmonton and other mid-size to large cities often pay even more, and they feel it personally every renewal cycle. I think there is consensus in this House that Alberta's insurance system isn't working. Our insurance rates are nearly at the top of the country, and urgent action is needed. That's why I'm introducing Motion 504 today.

What's especially frustrating for so many Albertans is that they can be good drivers, people who obey the rules, who haven't been at fault, who do everything right, and still watch their premiums jump year after year. In fact, the name "good driver rate cap" that this government introduced is a bit of a misnomer because it has less to do with good driving and more as a compromise from this government to private insurance providers, and frankly it doesn't provide any genuine relief to many Albertans.

You can see that reality in the government's own inflation numbers. The latest Statistics Canada release shows passenger

vehicle insurance premiums in Alberta rose 17.8 per cent year over year in October 2025 while overall inflation was about 2.2 per cent. So the cost of living is rising modestly, but the cost of insuring your vehicle is rising at nearly eight times that pace. Madam Speaker, that is not sustainable for any Albertan household that I know. I don't know about you.

If we recall, Madam Speaker, when Alberta's New Democrats were in government, we implemented a cap that limited premium increases to 5 per cent. We did that because we understood that mandatory insurance must be predictable and affordable. But in 2019, as we know, this government removed the cap, and we all know what happened next. It's exactly what Albertans had feared. Premiums spiked. Industry data reported in the media found that premiums increased roughly 24 per cent from early 2019 to mid-2020.

For those watching at home, a little bit of background. In 2024 this government brought in a good driver rate cap that, while initially tied to inflation, has now doubled to 7.5 per cent for good drivers, and the government has committed to keeping it at 7.5 per cent again. But, Madam Speaker, even the so-called good driver rate cap doesn't provide much relief to Albertans. First of all, to qualify as a good driver, you must have no at-fault claims in six years, no Criminal Code convictions in four, no major convictions in three, and no more than one minor conviction in three. AIRB estimates that about three-quarters of Alberta drivers do qualify.

Even if you qualify, the cap doesn't protect you from many normal life situations. The cap applies only at renewal with your current insurer, so if you decide to switch insurers or shop for a better deal, add or substitute a vehicle, move into a different rating territory, or make other common policy changes, you can lose the cap. A family buying a used minivan because their kids are growing or a renter moving across the city or a parent adding a teenager to the policy: these very normal, everyday milestones can mean losing protection against big hikes. It sounds like a pretty big loophole, doesn't it, Madam Speaker?

I want to share another story, the story of Derek Zabel, a constituent who, despite a flawless, claims-free record, has seen a 24.5 per cent increase in his auto insurance. This system has failed him and so many Albertans like him.

For the quarter of Albertans who don't qualify as good rate drivers, the story is worse. The Ratehub summary of AIRB filings notes that while good drivers were temporarily capped at 3.7 in 2024, when it came to 2025, 7.5 per cent meant those folks that didn't qualify for the good driver rate cap were seeing increases of 15 per cent or more. Madam Speaker, this is why people are so angry. They feel trapped in a system where the cap is porous. It's inconsistent. It's unpredictable.

Let's talk about where this continues to lead if we don't change course. A report by MNP commissioned by the Insurance Bureau of Canada projects that if the current rate cap structure remains in place without meaningful reform, Alberta premiums could rise about 87.6 per cent in the next 10 years. Again, Madam Speaker, Motion 504 is a sensible measure that ties increases to inflation. Now, I know that the government will argue that tying it to inflation is simply not tenable. Costs are going up for insurance companies. They'll say that claims costs are going up, theft is rising, vehicle repair costs are rising, severe weather causing catastrophic losses, et cetera.

[The Speaker in the chair]

While those pressures are real, Mr. Speaker, the truth is that these pressures are a further reason for policy action, not a reason to overload ever-higher costs onto households, which is exactly what

this government is doing. There is absolutely no evidence that a private, no-fault insurance will lower costs at all. We know that Ontario tried a version of it, and it collapsed. I think at the crux of the debate of this motion it's really answering this question: is this government willing to stand with everyday Albertans? All we've heard so far is that they stand for the interests of private insurance companies, not for you, not for everyday Albertans. I think Albertans see that contradiction clearly. They see the government telling them to tighten belts while insurers get permission to loosen theirs. This is unacceptable, and I urge all members of this House to pass this motion.

Thank you.

5:10

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

**Member Boparai:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak in strong support of Motion 504, a motion that calls on this government to take meaningful action on automobile insurance premiums by indexing the rate cap to inflation. This is not just a minor adjustment but a major step in the right direction towards fairness, affordability, and common sense.

Mr. Speaker, every day Albertans are telling us the same thing: life is getting more unaffordable. Families are being squeezed from every direction, from increases in grocery store prices, climbing rents and housing costs, skyrocketing utility bills, and now auto insurance premiums that add to the growing burden. For many households these costs are not optional. You need a car to get to work, to take your kids to school, to access health care, yet Alberta families are paying some of the highest insurance premiums in the entire country. This motion is about putting people first. It's about saying to Albertans: we hear you and we are prepared to act.

Mr. Speaker, let's talk about how we got here. When we, the Alberta NDP, were in government, we implemented a cap that limited annual auto insurance premium increases to 5 per cent. That cap provided stability and predictability for families. It was a safeguard against runaway costs. In 2019 the UCP government removed that cap. They sided with the insurance companies and left Albertans exposed to unchecked increases. What happened next? Premiums soared. Families saw their bills climb year after year with no relief in sight. In 2023, after mounting public pressure, the government introduced a temporary pause on rate increases, but that pause was short lived. Instead of reinstating a reasonable cap, the UCP raised the limit to 7.5 per cent annually, which is far above inflation and far above what families can afford.

Let's put that in perspective. Inflation in Alberta is hovering around 2 per cent. While the cost of living is rising modestly, insurance premiums can rise three or four times faster. That is not affordability. That is not fairness. That is a government choosing corporate profits over people.

Let's not forget that this government had options. They could have reinstated the 5 per cent cap. They could have explored public insurance models, like those in British Columbia or Manitoba. They could have introduced reforms to reduce costs for consumers. Instead, they choose to give insurers more room to raise rates. Mr. Speaker, Motion 504 proposes a simple, responsible solution: tie the auto insurance rate cap to Alberta's consumer price index. In other words, if inflation is 2 per cent, the cap is 2 per cent. If inflation is 3 per cent, the cap is 3 per cent. This approach ensures that increases are predictable, stable, and fair.

Right now the cap is 7.5 per cent. If this motion passes, the cap will drop to around 2 per cent today. That is really a relief for families who are struggling to make ends meet. This is not radical or unreasonable. It is common sense. It is how we manage other

programs and costs in this province. We index benefits, tax brackets, and social supports to inflation because we understand that people cannot absorb increases that outpace their income. Auto insurance should be no different.

Mr. Speaker, indexing also creates transparency. Families will know what to expect. They won't be blindsided by sudden steep hikes, and insurers will have a clear, predictable framework for rate adjustments.

Alberta now has some of the highest auto insurance rates in Canada, second only to Ontario. In Calgary and Edmonton premiums are among the highest in the entire country. Albertans spend more of their after-tax income on auto insurance than almost anywhere else in Canada. For working families, that's money that could go toward groceries, rent, or child care. Instead, it's going to insurance companies.

I want to take a moment to talk about the northeast quadrant of Calgary, where my riding is located and we have seen these increases hit the hardest. Northeast Calgary has faced unique challenges when it comes to auto insurance. After the devastating hailstorm in 2020, the costliest hailstorm in Canadian history, premiums in this area spiked dramatically. Families who had already endured thousands of dollars in property damage suddenly found themselves paying even more for insurance. Many were told their postal codes were considered high risk and, as a result, their rates climbed far beyond what was reasonable.

Mr. Speaker, let's remember who lives in northeast Calgary. This is a community of hard-working people, many of whom earn their living in transportation. They drive taxis, they work for ride-share companies, they deliver goods, they operate trucking businesses. For these families a vehicle isn't a luxury; it's their livelihood. When auto insurance costs rise unchecked, it's not just a household expense but a direct hit to their ability to earn a living. I have spoken to drivers who are paying \$4,000 or more annually just to keep their vehicles insured. It means longer hours on the road just to break even. It means less time with family. It means more stress and less security. Where many families are already managing tight budgets, these increases are devastating. They compound the affordability crisis and push people closer to the brink.

Mr. Speaker, this is why Motion 504 matters. Indexing the cap to inflation would bring fairness back to the system. It would prevent insurers from imposing arbitrary hikes on communities that have already been through enough. It would give families in northeast Calgary and across Alberta the stability they need to plan for the future. And it's not just urban families. In rural Alberta, where driving is essential, the burden is even heavier. People in smaller communities often face higher premiums because of limited competition and longer commutes. Indexing the cap to inflation is not just fair; it's fiscally responsible. It creates a predictable framework for rate adjustments and prevents sudden spikes to protect consumers.

5:20

In British Columbia, for example, reforms have significantly reduced premiums. In Quebec the rates are among the lowest in the country because of a public insurance model. Alberta does not have that system, but we can at least ensure that private insurers do not exploit families with unchecked increases.

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

**Member Arcand-Paul:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to speak in favour of Motion 504 put forward by my friend from Edmonton-South West because it focuses on what Albertans ask from us in this House. They're asking for us to make real steps

forward to address the affordability crisis that our communities are facing in every part of their lives.

While this government hung its hat on saving \$400 for Albertans under their new no-fault system when it rolls out in 2027, it is clear from the UCP's August 6 report that these savings are not mentioned. It cannot be found; 404, the link cannot be found. In fact, it doesn't even say how much each premium will drop by. Why is that? Well, that's why this motion is necessary today. We have a responsibility as legislators to provide to Albertans commitments from this government, to provide actionable relief to the pocketbooks of Albertans.

Times are tough for Albertans, and I know we hear it every single day from our constituents. Mr. Speaker, we know that this current system that is in place just simply does not bring relief to Albertans. This good-driver rate just misses the mark to bring this relief because this good-driver rate, since first introduced by this government, has jacked up from the initial 3.7 per cent to 7.5 per cent. Although the UCP has said that they may keep this cap at 7.5 per cent into 2026, how can Albertans trust this government?

Well, Mr. Speaker, that is the assurance that this motion will bring to our constituents because right now Albertans cannot trust this government to do what they actually say they will do. The UCP has the opportunity to provide this assurance to Albertans' insurance because this government's track record is not rosy at all. Look at public health care. They guaranteed that all Albertans needed to access health care was their health card; that is it. But now in this digest of a bill that we were just served in Bill 11, it will force Albertans to pull out their credit card instead of their health care card like the Premier promised. How does that help Albertans today with the out-of-control costs that they're facing, including insurance premiums?

And what about those drivers who are not considered a good driver? My friend from Edmonton-South West has highlighted that this was a quarter of Albertans. That is a million Albertans, Mr. Speaker. They are the Albertans that have at-fault claims in the previous six years, Criminal Code convictions in the previous three years, and more than one minor conviction in the previous three years. Yes, when you break the law as a motorist, you expect to be paying more; that is a given. I'm sure many folks in this Chamber know this. However, that good-driver rate also does not apply to an insured Albertan whose risk profile has materially changed from moving from one rating territory to another that poses higher risk. I'm thinking of those Albertans that are changing their housing and need to move to more affordable housing. We also think about adding or substituting a vehicle, significantly modifying their existing insured vehicle, or adding a new driver who has a worse driving record than the policyholder or no record at all.

I know that these Albertans do not want to see their rates be affected either, but I doubt this government will want to talk to those folks although they probably should because they may be the very constituents that this legislation will affect. They're moms and dads that add their teenager to the policy, like my wonderful friend from Edmonton-South West said. And, yes, they are also those folks with lifted trucks and oversized tires, things of that nature. Well, those folks are going to be affected under the new regime and won't be captured by the good-driver rate. Yet when those folks' insurance premiums go up, what recourse are they going to have?

What about young folks who are excited to get their lives on the road, literally and figuratively, to get to their jobs that this government is making sure they're getting paid less for, might I add? Somehow they also want them to have a job despite doing nothing to address the almost 20 per cent youth unemployment rate here in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, how does this help the good folks of Edmonton-West Henday or any Albertan in this province? How

does it help that youth that wants to move out of their parents' basement or who want to buy a house or, you know, just be a young person in the greatest province in this country?

Well, that is why this motion is absolutely necessary, to provide these assurances to those millions of Albertans when this government is just unable to provide such assurance. Instead of providing good governance to Albertans, they are using their power to put in place legislation and policies that distract from the inefficacy of the UCP at addressing the real concerns of Albertans, like the increasing costs.

We just heard the Member for Grande Prairie boast about the government's disastrous record on the price of electricity in Alberta, at 22 cents per kilowatt hour. Let's also remind Albertans of the time when this UCP government allowed a 32 cent per kilowatt hour rate in 2023. It does not have to be this way. Even I remember the good old days when Albertans were receiving rates as low as five or even, let's say, 10 cents per kilowatt hour. Under this UCP government we see the cost creep by private corporations unloading onto Albertans and this government so unwilling to address these rising costs. Instead, we see the minister continuously bemoan the losses that private insurance companies are experiencing because of this new system that they are muddying the waters with, as the minister said.

Our jobs are not to work for these private insurance companies. Our job is to work for Albertans, the people that elected us, the same people that look at their electricity bills and look at the additional line items that these private companies are off-loading onto Albertans, something our constituents ask for us to focus on in this Chamber. Yet we do not see this real relief come, and this is what this motion will do. We need to provide that assurance to Albertans that we are working on their priorities, that we are working on bringing these costs down, not those private corporate entities that are driving these costs up onto Albertans.

The same goes for our insurance costs. Yes, our climate has changed. Yes, the UCP refuses to acknowledge that. Yes, Albertans are feeling the pinch from these outrageous rates that have gone up. Mr. Speaker, it is also extremely clear that the UCP want folks to continue driving vehicles rather than take alternative methods of transportation, because they can't seem to stay in their lane when it comes to bicycles, light-rail transit, or, heck – I don't know – electric vehicles. This motion is all the more necessary given all these reasons. Albertans deserve a government that is committed on addressing the issues that befall them, and this motion by my brilliant colleague from Edmonton-South West, along with the bills and motions from this side of the House, are doing what Albertans have asked us to do.

We are in the community. We talk to our constituents. I think of all of the conversations that I have with young people, with parents that want their children and their young ones to do better than they are currently doing. They want them to move forward with a future where they can use the good-paying jobs that we create for them to work for the province, for our future as a wonderful province, and we can't do that if young ones and families are being affected by bad decisions like this new insurance regime.

This motion, while it won't fix things overnight, will require us to address skyrocketing automobile insurance premiums by indexing it. We know right now that Albertans want us to be focusing on that. They want us to bring their bills down instead of allowing them to be jacked up.

I think about the community groups that we participate in as legislators. We all read them. We all read the Facebook groups. They're all across this province. We see the comments that are made about the additional line items that I mentioned, but they also talk about how their insurance rates are going up at an exorbitant

rate, at a fast pace. They don't want to be paying higher insurance prices for adding their teen to their policy. Certainly, they don't want to see their young ones who are new on those roads, and I don't want to see my young ones who just got their learner's – I'm a little afraid of that. My niece and nephew are going to be hitting the road very shortly here, and they're going to be entering into this new policy regime.

5:30

We need to address the ability for them to even drive their vehicles on these roads because when we give them that autonomy and that ability to go from point A to B on their own, like many of us did back in the good old days, they'll be able to thrive. We want our young ones to thrive. We want our young people to thrive, but we also want our province to thrive. It is for these reasons that I believe this motion will do that work. Albertans asked us to, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

**Mrs. Sawyer:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to address an issue that impacts Albertans across the province, the cost of auto insurance. For many households owning a vehicle is a necessity, and with that comes significant expenses. The rising cost of auto insurance is among the top concerns for Albertans. We as a government understand this. The cost of car insurance has been on the rise for several years due to factors such as inflation, tariffs, and increasing occurrences of natural disasters. The fact is that car insurance prices in this province are too high, but our government is taking action. Our government already has a responsible, targeted solution in place: a good-driver rate cap for 2026 and a care-first insurance model coming in 2027 to stabilize rates for years to come.

Now, first things first. We have extended the 7.5 per cent good-driver cap through 2026 so Albertans see immediate support while long-term reforms take effect. This will help stabilize the market and offer motorists relief while the preparations are made to reshape the market into a care-first model. The care-first model will provide a practical solution for insurance here in Alberta, reducing costs for all drivers and keeping premiums low. The care-first model does so by eliminating the largest cost driver, court delays and legal fees, and will deliver more stable premiums and the strongest care benefits in Canada come 2027. This is good news, Mr. Speaker. The system we have in place currently is outdated, but there's hope on the horizon.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition's response to these reforms is purely political. Motion 504 shows they would rather play games than deliver solutions. Their proposal would drive up costs for Albertans and limit their choices in the insurance market.

Let's take a closer look at why this approach fails. This motion is urging the government to index Alberta's auto insurance cap to annual consumer price index changes. Unfortunately, indexing the rate cap to CPI ignores how auto insurance actually works in the real world. This is because, Mr. Speaker, premiums across Canada are impacted by factors of legal fees, vehicle repair costs, and severe weather, not the CPI. These are the facts. As such, it is completely laughable to insinuate that indexing rate caps in such a way would do anything to help drivers with their insurance costs. In fact, forcing a CPI-based cap would push insurers out of Alberta, reduce competition, and drive up premiums over the long term. That's not helpful to anyone, and it is a very revealing glimpse into the economic literacy of the opposition.

But I digress. Albertan families cannot afford another NDP socialist experiment that will indeed make the problem worse. If

this motion were to be adopted, insurers would leave this province faster than a Ford ends up at the mechanics. Competition would go down. [interjections] Hey, we drive a Dodge. Premiums would go up, and hard-working Albertans would be forced to foot the bill. That is simply unacceptable, and this government will not stand for that. This is a real issue, Mr. Speaker, and Albertans deserve a real solution so that they can see relief in their auto insurance costs.

That is exactly what this government is doing, and the opposition knows this. That is why they are tabling such a frivolous motion. It is a last-ditch attempt to prove to their base that they can provide solutions as well, but as I've stated earlier, they couldn't even get that right. Instead, they fall back on their old playbook of increased government control, the destruction of free markets, and complete socialist delusion. That is because indexing the rate cap to CPI would completely disconnect the cap from insurance cost realities. This means a reduction in competition, a destabilized market, and premiums would become less, not more, affordable over time. Albertans cannot afford to be part of this socialist ideology that seems to be very popular on the other side of the Assembly.

Simply put, Motion 504 would introduce an impractical scheme that makes premiums more volatile and limits choices for Albertans. This would be bad for Albertans, Mr. Speaker. There's no other way to put it. So in regard to Motion 504, I urge all members of the Assembly to vote down this motion. This is not a good plan. It will not reduce costs, and it will not help Albertans. We already have a tangible plan to do just that, and this motion is a mere partisan distraction from the good work we are doing.

We are listening to Albertans, and instead of offering a confusing, half-baked plan, we're taking a practical approach to deliver real results. The care-first model is proven, and it is the way forward for car insurance in this province. We have no reason to take the off-ramp into a socialist fantasy. Car insurance is an important issue because so many of us rely on our cars to get from point A to point B. It is our duty as elected representatives to make car ownership and the related costs as low as we can so that more money can be left in the pockets of drivers. Motion 504 is not the way to achieve this. As such, I urge all members of the Assembly to vote no on this proposal.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Dr. Elmeligi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's a lot to unpack there. I'm not really quite sure where to begin. I was just kind of jotting down some notes. I think it's really funny that whenever we're debating things in this House that are actually about serving the people, that word "socialism" is thrown around. Asking to create a scenario where auto insurance rates are indexed to inflation is not socialism. That's just serving the people and trying to make things a little more affordable. The member opposite wants to talk about socialism to incite fear and division among her base and her voters, and I guess that that's fine if that's what her voters want to hear, but it's not an accurate representation of this motion or the stance that our party takes to serve the people. Oh, there are so many things.

This motion will index auto insurance premiums to inflation. It's truly about affordability, Mr. Speaker. Everybody in this House seems to recognize that we're in an affordability crisis, that life is really expensive for Albertans. A motion like this helps make life a little easier for Albertans. It's looking at: what are the things that people are spending money on? And how can we make that a little cheaper so that we can ease the financial stress and pressure on Albertans?

I'll just say a couple of things in response to the member's debate just now. You know, the current rate of inflation in Alberta is 1.8 per cent, and across Canada it is 2.2 per cent. If we were to index auto insurance to inflation, it would probably increase at about 2 per cent. That's still quite a bit lower than the 7.5 per cent that the UCP has in their auto insurance plan when they decoupled it from inflation. So just right there car insurance will be more expensive as soon as you decouple it from inflation.

When I am going around my riding of Banff-Kananaskis, talking about affordability with people in my riding, groceries, rent, and car insurance are the three main buckets, I guess you could say, Mr. Speaker, that people are really struggling with. And when I say struggling, I mean I have many families living paycheque to paycheque. I have many minimum-wage earners in my riding who are working two or maybe three jobs just to be able to afford to live in the home that they're living in and feed their kids and be good parents and all of the things that come with that.

5:40

Affordability is very acute across Banff-Kananaskis, and a part of that affordability challenge is because, as one of the members on the opposite side mentioned, when you're in a rural setting, owning a car isn't really optional. You need a car to get around. You need a car to go in between communities and maybe to get around town as well. People need to have a vehicle, and increasing car insurance rates are a big part of the affordability challenges that people are facing.

I want to take a little bit of time here to talk about this good-driver rate cap. At first blush that seems like a good idea. If you're a good driver, you'll just pay less insurance. I feel like it's always been like that; I have always been a good driver, and some of my friends weren't, and I always paid less for insurance than they did.

Here's the challenge with this good-driver rate cap, Mr. Speaker. It defines a "good driver" as somebody who does not have any at-fault claims in the previous six years, any Criminal Code convictions in the previous four years, any major convictions in the previous three years, or more than one minor conviction in the previous three years. That all sounds really good, but then, of course, there are exemptions to what the good-driver rate cap applies to. That's where we start to create a lot of confusion, I would say, in the legislation and in the UCP's policy around automobile insurance.

We've got these criteria, but then it's, like: okay; hold on a second. If you change insurers, if you add people to your insurance, if you move from one province or territory to Alberta, if you have significantly modified the existing insured vehicle in a manner that materially increases the risk of the original vehicle that was insured, all of these kinds of things create exceptions to the good-driver rate, and now all of a sudden you're not a good driver. Now your insurance cap, your insurance premiums may increase, definitely more than 7.5 per cent. They could go up dozens and dozens of percentage points, Mr. Speaker.

There are a lot of reasons why "good driver" might not actually have anything to do with driving. They might not qualify for the rate cap because they're switching insurers or adding a vehicle or moving or adding family members with poor claims to their existing policy.

Newcomers and new drivers are also negatively affected by this definition of "good driver." Newcomers to Alberta may be disproportionately impacted since the rate cap is only applicable for policy renewals. New drivers coming to Alberta from other provinces or new drivers like young people are also disproportionately affected by earnings, Mr. Speaker. They may be

some of the lowest wage earners in our constituencies, and they may not be able to qualify for this good-driver status.

This also means that with a rate cap applying to policy renewals, good drivers may hesitate to switch insurers, Mr. Speaker, to avoid losing the benefits of this cap, and that reduces competition and starts to interfere in the free market. I do find it a little bit rich when the members opposite stand up and talk about how on this side of the House we don't value the free market, when their policies are literally reducing competition every single day in auto insurance.

I want to tell a little story, Mr. Speaker. My last daughter moved to Nelson in B.C. this weekend. My husband and I are officially empty nesters. I'm going to try not to cry. It's hard. I'm very proud of my daughter and the life that she's creating for herself in Nelson, but I will say that the reason why she left the Bow Valley is because she cannot afford to stay. When I go door-knocking in Canmore and Banff and also in Bragg Creek, I hear from a lot of parents who are in a similar situation to me that Alberta has become expensive for our young people, that they can't find jobs because youth unemployment is so high and the cost of living is so high that they can't afford to move out on their own. I want my daughter to move out. I want her to create that independent life. I sure wish she could have done it in her hometown, closer to me, obviously, but the reality is that her and her friends could not afford to stay in Canmore.

So we lose our young people from the rural setting. We lose them from smaller communities to the big city because that's where the jobs are or because it's more affordable or because they can get more roommates in a place. I don't know. Either way it creates this drain of youthful energy and vigour and experience that over time changes the fabric of our communities, Mr. Speaker, and it's hard. It's hard to witness that change happen in your town, and, of course, it's hard when it's your children that are moving far away to another province because they cannot afford to stay in the one that they've been born and raised in.

The member opposite spoke about how this motion would cause insurers to leave Alberta, Mr. Speaker. I'll tell another story about my constituency office manager who, when she came to Alberta, could not find an insurance company because every insurance company she approached was leaving Alberta. The truth is that insurance companies are already leaving Alberta with or without this motion. It's clear to me that we do have problems with insurance, and we do need some insurance reform. This motion is not about supporting insurance companies; it's about supporting Albertans.

I kind of feel like most of the time that we're debating insurance, the members opposite talk about insurance companies and how much money they've lost over time, but I want to talk about Albertans. I want to talk about low-income Albertans who are struggling to make ends meet, who are forced to pay higher auto insurance, and a 7.5 per cent cap that they may or may not qualify for is too high. It is increasing the cost of monthly bills, and this government isn't doing anything about it to actually reduce monthly bills for people, Mr. Speaker. That is what we need. We need a government that actually wants to serve the people, and this motion would be a step towards that.

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

**Member Tejada:** Thank you, sir. Oh, wow. That's a lot to live up to, folks. Okay. All right.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise to speak to Motion 504 as proposed by my wonderful colleague from Edmonton-South West. It's heartening to see that on this side of the House we're actually proposing motions and bills that work for Albertans and

endeavour to give them relief on affordability as opposed to the folks opposite. Motion 504 urges this government to tie auto insurance increases to inflation. The motion is practical and really, if we think about it, pretty low-hanging fruit if this government was actually interested in giving Albertans material help on affordability. The intent of this motion, of course, is to pump the brakes, so to speak, a bit on skyrocketing motor insurance premiums and to make sure that those rates aren't actually able to outpace inflation.

Now, just to rewind a little bit to when Bill 47 was introduced, my office was inundated with e-mails and phone calls about why enabling insurance companies to increase insurance rates up to 15 per cent would be the straw that could break their backs in terms of their finances. They're just already struggling so much with the cost of living. We know that Albertans are struggling to pay their bills, and this government has very ambitiously done everything in their power to make their lives even more expensive. When they had the chance to limit increases on rent, they voted that down. When it came to utilities, they removed caps on those. When it comes to disabled folks who are on AISH, this government decided to claw back the hard-fought \$200 federal disability benefit. They increased prescription costs for seniors, decided to keep Alberta's minimum wage at the lowest in the country, I mean, except for the youth minimum wage, which is another \$2 less an hour.

You know, when it comes to thinking about insurance and the cost of driving a car, it wasn't long ago that the Premier waxed on about why youth unemployment was so low. She offered that this was because people don't get licenses soon enough. I don't know who the folks opposite are talking to, but the idea that the barrier to employment for young people is not having a license completely misses the point that many parents, and I'm talking parents, can barely afford the cost of owning a vehicle, fuel costs, and insurance, never mind adding their young folks into the mix.

**5:50**

I could really go on when I think about how this government has made life more expensive for Albertans in general, but, of course, we have limited time to do that. If we focus on auto insurance, this government has prioritized insurance companies over hard-working Albertans. We know this pattern very, very well. Whenever given the opportunity to give their corporate friends a raise or give tangible relief to Albertans on the cost of living, they'll always choose the former.

We know that it's been a hot-button issue for a long time, so I'll just do a little bit of a background here on auto insurance. When, of course, we had an Alberta New Democrat government we knew already that insurance took out a big chunk of people's paycheques. We implemented a limit on how much premiums could go up, and it was about 5 per cent. The UCP removed this when elected in 2019, and we all know what happened as a result of that. Everyone's insurance premiums went up, mine included.

In 2023, of course, there was a rate pause enacted. They ended that rate pause and instead shifted to a good driver rate cap as a short-term solution. We know that the cap on good drivers is a combination of insurance premiums and a top-up for catastrophic losses, but even at that, when you think about who that might include, of course, that would actually exclude new drivers, let's say new Canadians. All of those folks would be subject to even bigger increases in terms of insurance.

When we're talking about affordability, Alberta's auto insurance rates have fluctuated between the highest and second-highest in the country. We know that Calgary and Edmonton are two of the most expensive cities and that, really, this government only pretends to care when they're talking about affordability pressures on the

average Albertan. They love to make announcements essentially trying to convince us that when they vote in increases for their corporate friends, somehow it's good for us. It's no surprise to anyone here that it's getting more expensive to live here, to raise a family, if you are a parent, like me, with teenagers who are just on the verge of being able to be on the roads, something I also get a little bit nervous about, as my colleague from Edmonton-West Heday mentioned. I'm sure they'll do great.

We know that people are struggling just to keep the lights on, and when it comes to affordability on insurance, having this tied to inflation is just one of the tangible ways that we can support families. We know that it's not a surprise to most of us that affordability is up, so by tying it to inflation we know that this is one of the ways that they can support families.

For that reason I encourage everyone in this House to vote in favour of Motion 504.

**An Hon. Member:** Call the question.

**The Speaker:** That's my job. It is awfully close to 5:55, and I don't see anybody else standing up. [interjections] No, other than the mover. Under Standing Order 8(3), which provides up to five minutes for the sponsor of a Motion Other than Government Motion to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West to do just that.

**Mr. Ip:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to close debate. I want to read some excerpts from a letter I received from a constituent. At the heart of this motion this is what this is about. It's about fighting for everyday Albertans who are facing the astronomical rise in costs of auto insurance. It's from my constituent Derek, and he writes:

Dear Minister Horner and Premier Smith . . .

[interjections] Oh. Sorry, my apologies. Let me try that again.

**The Speaker:** Yeah. You can't use names. You know that.

**Mr. Ip:** Thank you.

I am writing to you not just as a policyholder, but as a concerned Albertan who has uncovered a significant failure in the consumer

protection framework your government has put in place for automobile insurance.

Despite having a perfect, claims-free driving record, I was subjected to a 24.5% premium increase by my insurer . . . in July 2025. This increase, from \$1,960 to \$2,419 annually . . . was justified by exploiting a loophole in the Ministerial Order 24/2024 – an Order your office, Minister, signed with the stated intent of protecting “good drivers” like me. My new home, occupied since July 30, 2024, as evidenced by the City of Edmonton Occupancy Permit . . . is a brand-new, Single Detached House . . . Yet, AMA applied a 5-year historical claims average . . . to remove [any] rate cap, ignoring the lack of prior claims data for my property and ongoing construction nearby.

**Mr. Speaker,** he goes on to say that,

Albertans who do everything right should not be punished by a broken system. I urge you to ensure that the government's commitment to protecting good drivers is upheld in practice, especially as development continues to reshape our communities.

**Mr. Speaker,** these are just very brief excerpts.

What we have heard from this government time and time again is that they're not on the side of everyday Albertans. They're siding with insurance companies. Motion 504 should be a really easy win for this government. It gives household stability, it even gives insurers a predictable framework, and it gives this government a credible affordability policy for the years until 2027. But rather than voting in favour – well, we haven't voted yet, but I urge them to vote in favour. There's still an opportunity to stand up and do the right thing and side with everyday Albertans.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, I urge all in this House to vote in favour of Motion 504. Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 504 lost]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I now move that the Assembly be adjourned until 7:30 tonight.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:58 p.m.]







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