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The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, November 24, 2025

Day 14

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

Second Session

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New Democrat: 38

Independent: 2

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, November 24, 2025

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 4

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

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speake. Thank you very much. I rise today to move third reading of Bill 4, the Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2).

This is a simple, common-sense bill. The legislation is about allowing officers to form an association through the Police Officers Collective Bargaining Act, which governs labour relations for municipal police officers in Alberta. It's about protecting victims of domestic violence and fixing bureaucratic holes in our justice system.

While this government acts to protect Albertans, there are certainly other folks opposite who seem to want to stall, oppose, or complain. Mr. Speaker, this is simply about public safety. Bill 4 will strengthen the foundation of the new Alberta sheriffs police service by ensuring its future police officers have the same collective bargaining rights and labour relations rules as municipal police services in the province, something you would think would be supportive of the members opposite.

They claim the sheriffs do not want this. Well, Mr. Speaker, I too have spoken to many sheriffs in this province, and they're telling me a very, very different story. My office has heard directly from sheriffs, and from those conversations I can tell you that there is immense excitement. As well, the chief of the Alberta sheriffs police service is out talking to members frequently about opportunities that, quite frankly, are just around the corner.

Instead of supporting these hard-working men and women, the NDP waste time talking about everything other than what is in this bill. The opposition spent hours talking about items completely and utterly unrelated to the bill because, frankly, Mr. Speaker, there is nothing in this bill to vote against.

Yet still the opposition is not transparent and is, quite frankly, full of misinformation. For example, they will tell Albertans in this House that Alberta's government is dismantling ALERT. I heard, Mr. Speaker, that the integrated child exploitation teams are being cut. That is simply not true and quite frankly has nothing to do with this bill. We spend over \$55 million on ALERT annually and increased the size of ICE to over 60 investigators. That's double what it was not only a short time ago. The NDP also claimed that we're cutting victim's services. It's absurd. That is not true. They are terrified of innovation, Mr. Speaker. They are stuck in the past, and we're trying to build a modern policing service that is responsive to Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I know that's tough because the Leader of the Official Opposition in 2020 defunded the police in Calgary by \$20 million. That's 5 per cent of the policing budget, and this caused catastrophic harm to the Calgary Police Service when he was the mayor of Calgary, which the service, quite frankly, has still not recovered from. I think it's clear how the NDP would govern if, God forbid, they were ever given a second chance . . .

Member Ceci: How about fine revenues?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, as I have said before, people in rural Alberta have rights. Despite what the person in Calgary-Buffalo seems to think – you know what? – rural Albertans have rights, and we need to make sure that when someone is calling for the police, someone is attending that call in a timely manner. I cannot justify having a sheriff who is minutes away from a break and enter spend a half hour explaining to a complainant that they just cannot help. It's not right, and I will not stand for it.

So the ASPS will continue to augment and support the police services in the province, including in Calgary, including in Edmonton, and including in rural Alberta, Mr. Speaker. The NDP can stand on the sidelines and criticize and deny the white paper even exists which says that Public Safety Canada may not continue in contract policing past 2032. That is a decision, quite frankly, that has not been made by the federal cabinet as of today.

Mr. Speaker, in fact, I would advise members of this House to read this report but also actually read the government's legislation. They would say that the Alberta sheriffs police service would be under the direction of myself. That is once again absurd. This is entirely false. The members of the House who have actually read the legislation will already know that the ASPS will be an independent entity separate from the government. They have their own chief. They have their own oversight board.

The other side of the House may like to fearmonger, but this government is focused on keeping Albertans safe, and we will stand with all of our officers – all of our officers – to ensure that we do keep communities safe. When someone calls 911 in Alberta, I expect someone in uniform to show up to that call to service in a reasonable amount of time. I have heard horror stories from rural municipalities about the lack of police and their response times to calls for service, and it is not acceptable for First Nations people to wait six days for a response from their current contract service providers, Mr. Speaker. It is not acceptable for First Nations to hire foreign mercenaries to deal with violent, repeat criminal offenders. It is not acceptable for First Nations people to just accept that police are just not coming to the emergency.

Those are not my words. Those are the words of chiefs all throughout this province, and I will not continue to stand for it. This is why we are continuing to do what we are doing. Every Albertan, regardless of where they live, deserves to feel safe. They deserve to feel secure, and they deserve a timely response when they call 911. Anything else is just simply unacceptable.

I too was at RMA last week, as I am sure the members opposite were as well. I'm sure they heard the same stories. Authorized strength levels in the RCMP are at a very concerning level right across Canada, Mr. Speaker. This is not exclusive to Alberta: 30 per cent short in Manitoba, 25 per cent short in Saskatchewan. These are consistent numbers that we are seeing right throughout the country. We're talking about thousands of people that the RCMP are short, so we must be nimble. We must think outside of the box in order to help police jurisdictions right here in Alberta, and this is the quickest way to get boots on the ground in a timely manner.

The ASPS will fill the operational gaps that other police services cannot currently meet. Mr. Speaker, the lack of physical officer presence in a timely response is the core complaint that I have heard consistently from Alberta municipalities all throughout this province. So work is well under way to establish the ASPS's organizational capacity and the operational standards through this bill. These amendments would help ensure that service is ready to provide municipalities with another choice for meeting their law enforcement needs, and I urge all members opposite to put any

differences aside and vote for enhanced public safety in this province.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, the bill strengthens our defence against the scourge of domestic violence through vital amendments to the Disclosure to Protect Against Domestic Violence (Clare's Law) Act. This is a literal matter, of course, of life or death. We are giving the Integrated Threat and Risk Assessment Centre the clear legal authority to cut through bureaucratic red tape and immediately access police databases. Time is, of course, of the essence when life is at risk, and we are closing that loophole that may cause any fatal delay. Our actions ensure that when a vulnerable Albertan seeks protection, trained officers can share that critical information quickly, responsibly, and with absolute certainty. If the opposition policy may be to keep victims waiting, which I hope that it is not, then, of course, certainly they have a right to vote no to this bill.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, the legislation improves the operational efficiency of our correctional system. The amendments to the Corrections Act establishes a clear, modern legal framework that allows Alberta's government to enter into interjurisdictional agreements to transfer adult inmates with other provinces and territories, something that did occur when the Northwest Territories came and was evacuated into Alberta. Some issues were identified, and these are just being rectified. This is basic, good, responsible government. It ensures that we maintain custody and continuity for complex cases during emergencies like floods and wildfires, and it just makes sense.

7:40

So, in closing, this bill is very simple. It's about providing police officers the ability to form a collective bargaining association, which is allowed under the police officer collective bargaining agreement. This is consistent with all police services in Alberta. Secondly, it is about protecting victims of domestic violence. Thirdly, it is about streamlining the system for corrections in the event of an emergency. Mr. Speaker, I hope everyone in this Chamber truly understands how simple this bill is, and I hope that the NDP understands that, and I encourage all members of the House to support this bill.

I once again move third reading of Bill 4, the Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2).

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Deputy Premier and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services has moved third reading of Bill 4, and I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise and speak to Bill 4 at third reading and to respond to some of the comments from the minister. To be absolutely clear, as we have said repeatedly, we support the amendments to Clare's law. We believe those are important. Those need to go through. We support that portion of the bill. We have no issue with the corrections portion of the bill. By all means that streamlining should be done. We are living in an age where we are going to see more and more wildfires, other emergencies. We need to have the proper protocols in place. We support that.

Now, the minister says that the rest of it around, you know, the police association, those pieces – and indeed, if you're forming a police service, absolutely, then you need to have a police association. But when the minister says this is simple and common sense, he is badly mistaken. This is not simple. This is another step in this government's choice to create a massive, new public agency to take over law enforcement in the province of Alberta, to replace

the RCMP at a cost of nearly a billion dollars for the transition and nearly a billion dollars in operating costs every single year.

So is this one small step? Yes. The minister has chosen to take that massive endeavour and spread it out across a number of bills, but the fact is that Bill 4 is the next piece, the next step in that endeavour, one which a broad majority of Albertans have already said they don't support.

So the minister is being incredibly disingenuous in suggesting that we should simply support Bill 4. The fact is that we cannot. We made it quite clear when we brought it forward at Committee of the Whole that we supported the Clare's law amendments and we supported the corrections pieces. So let's be absolutely clear on that piece.

Let's take a look at this then, Mr. Speaker, what the minister is saying. You know, also he took a little bit of a drive-by smear there against the Leader of the Opposition, talked about him defunding police. Let's be absolutely clear, Mr. Speaker. The only folks who have ever defunded the Calgary Police Service is the UCP government.

From the *Calgary Herald*, published October 29, 2019, "The UCP will hike the province's share of fine revenue from 26.7 per cent to 40 per cent, amounting to \$10 million annually that will no longer be returned to Calgary Police Service." Ten million dollars out of the pockets of the Calgary Police Service that was taken by this government to fill their budget, Mr. Speaker. It says, "The province will also impose new charges for DNA testing . . . which could cost CPS up to \$2 million annually." So let's clear the record, Mr. Speaker. It was this government with that minister at the cabinet table that defunded Calgary Police Service.

Mr. McDougall: Two thousand twenty-five.

Mr. Shepherd: Now, I heard one of the members yelling about 2025, at which time the Leader of the Opposition was far from being the mayor of Calgary, so I'm not quite sure what the Minister of Advanced Education is yelling about.

Let's be clear. What we are talking about here, Mr. Speaker, is the continuation of this government's plan to replace the RCMP with an Alberta provincial police service, something they did not campaign on, something they have not consulted on, something for which they have presented no business plan, something for which they have presented no budget or costing. Now . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members, I didn't have any trouble hearing the minister. I'm just making a wild guess that the opposition might not have agreed with everything the minister said, but it was easy to hear because they didn't say anything. Let's offer the same courtesy to the Member from Edmonton-City Centre, shall we?

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, if the members opposite don't want to take my word for it, perhaps they'll take the word of Kara Westerlund, the current president of the Rural Municipalities of Alberta association. Now, the minister said that he consulted, that he talked to folks at RMA last week. He claims he had support. Table it. Let's see some names. Let's see the folks that are ready to sign on the dotted line and contract with this government for a service which they have yet to actually outline and for which they can't provide any costs.

Here's what Kara Westerlund had to say: "You heard the minister talk about RCMP or policing services not being used in the municipalities or calls going unanswered. It's interesting because we have seen no plans, no concrete information or data about how they're going to recruit officers, how they're going to deploy the officers. Right now we just have a lot more questions and concerns and very valid concerns. The province seems to be pushing ahead

and moving forward with their plans, but there are no details. Where are the feasibility studies? Where's the data to prove that what their proposing is going to be better than what we've got? Absolutely, we all want to increase service levels in our municipalities, but who's going to pay for it? What's it going to look like? What does it mean?"

She goes on to say, Mr. Speaker, in response to the minister talking about RCMP staffing shortages: "You heard the minister talk about shortages of officers, but that's not unique to the RCMP, Calgary Police Service, Edmonton Police Service. Any police service in Alberta, municipal or provincial, is having struggles right across the country. Actually, it's a North America issue of having this recruitment issue."

Let's be clear, Mr. Speaker. The very folks who the minister says that he is doing this work for, who he says are going to be his customers for this business he is building, with no business plan, no cost structure, no budget, are saying that they've still got a lot of questions, and this is after a year and a half of legislation, coming up on two years.

First bill, Bill 11, came out in spring of 2024, followed by Bill 49 in the spring of this year, followed by Bill 4 now. Every single time he brings one of these bills in, every time he moves further with actually setting up the infrastructure and planning and all the pieces for his provincial police service, the same people have the same questions and raise the same concerns because the minister isn't talking to them. A casual conversation over a beer at Rural Municipalities of Alberta association is not the same as actually sitting down with town councils with a detailed business plan, actually answering questions, actually putting numbers on the table. The minister has refused to do that.

When we are talking about nearly a billion in taxpayer dollars to transition, nearly a billion in operating costs year over year – that's from the government's own report that they commissioned from PricewaterhouseCoopers in 2021, back when they actually did a semblance of consultation, back when they actually dared to put some numbers on the table, not like the cowardly actions we see from this government now, which bullies legislation through and refuses to be accountable for it or actually put their money where their mouth is.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that Bill 4 is a continuation of disrespect towards rural Albertans, towards the men and women of the RCMP. The minister says that he wants to improve service. Well, the fact is that this government has been in charge of the EMS system in rural Alberta for six years, and we continue to see regular reports of people who nearly die because an ambulance is not available when they call for one. Their local emergency department is not open. This government has not solved the problem with recruiting paramedics or improving service or improving coverage, yet they expect us to believe they can stand up this massive new agency and out of the blue take on the work that the RCMP have been doing for decades in this province and they will magically fix everything, like the Premier fixed health care in 90 days.

7:50

The fact is that, Mr. Speaker, this is not an idle plaything. This is a very serious issue, and if this minister took it seriously he would be more than just sitting in his ivory tower, putting the pieces together. He would actually be out consulting with the community, actually talking to people on the ground. I'll tell you that when I was at Alberta Municipalities, when I talk to people from the RMA, there is still a lot of support for the RCMP. When the minister suggests that the problem is that the RCMP are the ones that don't want to come to the table and won't commit, let's be absolutely

clear. The B.C. government is in the preparations to already begin those negotiations.

And you know what? When the folks in the RCMP talk about the situation, when the gentleman appeared at the public committee with the Canada Senate, what he said is that they are beginning those conversations and all provinces except one have indicated they're interested in renegotiating. Gee, Mr. Speaker, I wonder which one province that is that has already told the RCMP, regardless of the decision that's made by the federal government, even if the federal cabinet makes that final decision to back up what they've been saying, that they are here to renegotiate. It sure sounds like the minister and this government have already told them: no, thank you.

That is not what they have been telling Albertans. That is not what they've been telling their municipal partners. They've been telling them: all options are on the table; we believe in choice. Mr. Speaker, this government is already planning and pretty far down the road to cutting off that choice for Albertans. Again, the minister is being incredibly disingenuous when he says that he is doing this for anyone other than this government and their own political ambitions and interests.

Now, the minister says that it's laughable to suggest that he will be personally in charge and be able to influence the Alberta sheriff's police service because there will be an independent public body. Let's remember, Mr. Speaker, what this government's record is with respecting the autonomy of independent public bodies.

We've got a whole scandal still going through investigation about how this government is quite plausibly alleged to have directly interfered with Alberta Health Services, an independent public body. In fact, the DynaLife report that was just laid on the table by the Auditor General highlights many points at which this government directly interfered with that independent public body to force them to go through with a contract that they were warning this government was going to be disastrous for Albertans, and it was, at a cost of \$125 million and a whole lot of people's health and well-being.

We've seen this government attempt to basically try to interfere with the Alberta Energy Regulator, with the Alberta Electric System Operator, when they put through their renewables ban. We have seen this government interfere with regulation around coal in this province to force through a coal mine that had already been rejected.

Member Ceci: How much did that cost?

Mr. Shepherd: We're still figuring out how much that one is going to cost.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, we are paying on multiple fronts for a government which does not have any respect for the rule of law, does not have any respect for conflict of interest. It is not impossible to think that this government would also be more than happy to interfere with the independent operation of a provincial police force. After all, this is a government headed by a Premier who was found by the Ethics Commissioner to have broken conflict of interest law in attempting to interfere in a criminal case. That's not conjecture; it's not a fairy tale; it's fact, and this government has only gotten more arrogant and more entitled since, which is evidenced by the fact that they are continuing to push forward this legislation despite the fact that they have not consulted on it.

In fact, they just spent this whole past summer with their dog-and-pony show of the Alberta Next town hall talking about, "Well, maybe we should do this," while they, in fact, had already moved two pieces of legislation to make it happen and are now moving their third. Albertans deserve better, Mr. Speaker. They deserve a

government that actually respects them enough not to pull a bait and switch, a government that respects them enough not to put its own interests ahead of theirs.

There is no reason any Albertan should trust this government to credibly be able to set up something as complex, with something that has such a deep impact as a provincial police service because they've demonstrated time and time again that they can't put their own interests aside in these things. They have no competence in these things, and when they set these things up, they end in disaster, at a huge cost to Albertans.

Albertans deserve an honest reckoning, real consultation, and a government that will actually respect their wishes in how we meet what we acknowledge is a real problem. We do need to do better for rural Alberta. They do have rights. They do deserve better service, but this government and this minister have shown no credibility that their intended solution is going to get us anywhere close to there.

That is why, Mr. Speaker, I will be voting against Bill 4, because Albertans deserve better, better than this government, better than their disregard and their disrespect. They deserve a government that will present a real solution for public safety, one that is built in collaboration and in partnership, that is not based on misinformation and baseless accusations against the men and women who proudly serve us in our province now and who have the support of so many Albertans for their work in the RCMP.

It's my hope that maybe some of these government members will start listening to the folks in their constituency, to the local rural leaders, the folks who are telling them that they want better and that they are not interested in this government-run provincial police force.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: On third reading of Bill 4, the hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia, and before I sit down, I'll apologize to the previous member for getting his constituency name wrong a little earlier.

Go ahead.

Member Batten: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this evening to join the debate on Bill 4, public safety act. I just want to start by being very clear: Clare's law saves lives. It is a tool rooted in tragedy and designed to help people identify risks and protect themselves. It deserves attention. It deserves strengthening. It deserves investment and consistency. What it does not deserve is to be tied to a multibillion-dollar political project Albertans have rejected at every stage, which of course is what we're learning about here in Bill 4: the provincial police force.

Clare's law should not be used as a cover, survivors should not be used as packaging, and domestic violence prevention should not be used as a lever to push through an agenda that the public has already clearly said no to. Mr. Speaker, it's especially shameful in that it is the month of November, which is Family Violence Prevention Month, when we should all be focused on those upstream investments like supporting survivors, funding shelters, stabilizing housing, and ensuring that education and early intervention is happening.

This government instead has chosen to bring forward yet another attempt to advance the policing agenda that Albertans have consistently rejected. This is just more of the same: more misplaced priorities, more political sleight of hand, more wasted energy. We just heard the minister complain that the opposition continues to debate, referencing all the real priorities of Albertans instead of directly talking about what's inside this bill. That's kind of the point, Mr. Speaker. There are certainly aspects of this bill that we

support. As I said, Clare's law: absolutely. We should strengthen it, and it should not be tied to something that undermines that safety.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I know you're aware of this. Albertans send hundreds, if not thousands, of e-mails to our constituency offices every single week.

8:00

Albertans know what's going on in here. They're paying attention. They're tired of the political theatrics. They're tired of watching decisions being made based on ideology rather than evidence. They're tired of instability being framed as leadership, or rants from this government about other governments instead of ever taking accountability for their own actions. Albertans want stability, real stability; not the kind that comes only after a government-created chaos. Just look at the state of health care. We will not get stability by creating chaos and then congratulating ourselves for sort of cleaning it up. We don't build trust by having, at this point, seemingly weekly preventable outbreaks in our hospitals or in our long-term care. We don't build confidence in this government when we have influenza rates, and I quote: out of control. If this government truly wanted to talk about public safety, they should be stabilizing health care, not destabilizing policing.

Some of my colleagues who spoke earlier made some very good points. The Member for Calgary-Varsity spoke about the sheer waste of resources that this bill was bringing forward. The members for Edmonton-Manning and for Calgary-Klein both noted a sense of déjà vu or Groundhog Day, and, yeah, here we are again as opposition trying to push back on a police force that Alberta simply doesn't want. The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood highlighted that actual investment looks like upstream supports, community-rooted solutions, evidence-based priorities, but here we are again, the same question being asked and the government refusing to accept the answer. This bill is the political equivalent of asking Albertans the same question over and over and over again and hoping they will eventually give up.

Albertans deserve better than being worn down. They deserve to be heard, you know, the first time. If this government really wanted stability to be their talking point, Albertans know better. Stability cannot be claimed after you've disrupted everything else around yourself. The DynaLife fiasco: more than \$125 million spent, piled on top of human cost. Preventable outbreaks are spreading through our health care settings. AISH recipients are still falling further behind, meanwhile this government upped the monthly allowance for MLAs. They defend skyboxes. Turkish Tylenol still has Albertans shaking their heads. Such a waste. Somehow, even though our schools are overcrowded, our teachers are underpaid, and the classrooms are bursting at the seams, when this government could not find money to properly compensate the educators taking care of, literally, our future, they could find money for this police force that no one wants.

Mr. Speaker, I have a strong dislike for waste and redundancy, and this government is building their legacy on it. We can't ignore the mistreatment of labour in this province. The government claims that: oh, we're going to create this new police force. Where are you getting your workforce? As mentioned just moments ago by the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, this government has proven themselves incapable of securing workforce for the majority of health care. Why would Alberta trust them to suddenly be able to do the same elsewhere when they've never been able to before?

Now, prevention, of course, begins a long way before police intervention, before Clare's law. It begins with housing stability, mental health supports, addiction treatment, child care, education, newcomer support. I could go on, Mr. Speaker. If, in fact, we wanted to address domestic violence, we wouldn't be focused on

the violence piece. We'd be focused on preventing the crisis to start with.

Now, briefly, before I pass the baton to my colleagues, just this last weekend I was witness to a panel discussion talking about the prevention of domestic violence. This is a group of 100, 150 men who all came together to discuss their role in the prevention of domestic violence. The focus and what the answer ended up at every single question came back to the same thing. It is all about early interventions. It's about actually meeting people where they're at. That means investing in those systems, not just throwing good money after bad for something that Albertans don't want.

Mandela House, located in the beautiful riding of Calgary-Klein, which is I guess a brother nonprofit to Ruth's House, which is located in the beautiful riding of Calgary-Acadia, offers Alberta's first ethnocultural emergency shelter and transitional housing for Black men experiencing homelessness due to family violence. They provide counselling, skill development, and wraparound supports that are grounded in that community. They are just one example of hundreds of underfunded, overstretched front-line organizations that are doing the real work. I would love for Bill 4 to actually be about safety.

I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker; it is not about Albertans. It is about a pet project that continues to get pushed by this government. Now all they've done is added a very important Clare's law into the mix as the sugar to make what they're forcing down Albertans' throats a little easier. That is shameful.

With that, I urge everyone to vote against Bill 4.

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

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in firm opposition of Bill 4 because this legislation misunderstands what safety is, how safety is created, and who must be involved in shaping the systems that govern safety on treaty lands. This government has said that Bill 4 is about protecting communities, but you cannot protect communities if you do not empower them, and you cannot strengthen safety by weakening partnerships, weakening accountability, and slashing prevention programs.

Mr. Speaker, I also speak today with over three years of experience of sitting on the Edmonton Police Commission, a civilian body legally responsible for governance, oversight, and holding the chief of police and the service to account. My dear late mushum Cecil served over 25 years as a member of the RCMP, and between us nearly three decades of practice, oversight, and experience. I know what policing looks like when it works, and I also know what it looks like when it does not. This bill is taking us in the wrong direction. In fact, it's taking Alberta backwards.

I want to begin with our treaty relationship. Treaty is shared governance, shared responsibility, and shared decision-making between the Crown and First Nations, a constitutional relationship affirmed by section 35 and repeatedly upheld by the Supreme Court of Canada, the Haida case, the Mikisew case, the Tsilhqot'in case, and many others. Mr. Speaker, I know that this government has met with chiefs. Meeting the chiefs is not the issue. The issue is that the chiefs have told me that this government heard them but did not respond to what they heard and definitely did not empower the chiefs. They were promised action but nothing in writing. They were invited to meetings, but not invited to codevelop the bill. They were given nods, but absolutely no authority, no investment, no shared decision-making, not a single clause that reflects their leadership. Consultation without authority is not treaty implementation. It is colonialism with better catering. When legislation reshapes policing, emergency services, and public safety

powers, all systems that disproportionately impact Indigenous peoples, First Nations cannot simply be participants. We must be partners.

8:10

Bill 4 ignores that fundamental truth. Mr. Speaker, Bill 4 expands policing and emergency service powers, but it does not expand Indigenous civilian oversight, community governance over safety, public accountability measures, or transparent reporting requirements. Dr. Michelle Lawrence calls this, quote, "authority creep" and, quote, "the steady expansion of state power while the checks on power remain completely frozen." We know where that leads, Mr. Speaker: racialized enforcement, overpolicing of Indigenous peoples, and declining of Albertans' trust.

First Nations and Métis people are a very small percentage of Alberta's population, but we fill the jails. We are the unhoused, and we are the ones in a mental health crisis. When you expand enforcement in a society marked with inequity, rooted in colonialism, all this government is doing with this bill is expanding inequality. Bill 4 fails to acknowledge this reality, Mr. Speaker. It contradicts the spirit and the intention and the requirements of the United Nations declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples.

You see, this declaration requires free, prior, and informed consent on laws affecting Indigenous peoples. In fact, this government can read it themselves: article 19, the protection of Indigenous women with disabilities and persons with disabilities; article 22, Indigenous participation in administering programs related to justice and safety; article 23. Let me remind this UCP government that a conversation is not consent. And to be crystal clear, a briefing is not a partnership, and a promise without paper is not implementation. The United Nations declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples calls for codevelopment, not after-the-fact notification. Bill 4 falls dramatically short, embarrassingly so.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls told us very plainly that public safety systems in Canada continue to fail Indigenous women, yet this bill expands power without addressing the systemic failures we already know too well as Indigenous women. This UCP government cannot stand in this House and declare at the top of their lungs, I might add – just because they say it loud doesn't make it so – repeatedly asserting to protect vulnerable people while ignoring the systems that place them in the risk in the first place.

Elders, chiefs, and scholars warned us decades ago in the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, in the 1980s: when the mechanisms of colonialism are left without oversight or partnership, they do exactly what they're designed to do, and that is perpetuate genocide.

Mr. Speaker, sadly, this bill strengthens the wrong tools. The most essential piece of public safety, the one missing entirely in this bill, is prevention. Alberta does not have a policing crisis; Alberta has a prevention negligence crisis completely created by this UCP government's decisions. The evidence is overwhelming in the research. Housing reduces police contacts by over 70 per cent. Supportive housing reduces emergency use like EMS and paramedics and firefighters by over 70 per cent. Housing first reduces justice involvement by up to 50 per cent. The Calgary Homeless Foundation shows that housing saves \$34,000 per person per year in justice and in health costs.

Mr. Speaker, you cannot argue with the basic, simple math. When government cuts prevention, like this UCP government does, the police get the call. No youth supports? The police get the call. No detox beds? The police get the call. No mental health care? The police get the call. No housing? The police get the call. No place to defecate? The police get the call. No place to urinate? The police

get the call. Police are responding to failures created by decisions made by this UCP government, and instead of fixing the root causes, Bill 4 adds more power where the problem cannot be solved, just simply perpetuated.

International jurisdictions have reduced crime, and they did it with one simple, common-sense thing. They all invested in prevention, not enforcement. Portugal: research it. Finland: look at it. Scotland: read about it. Housing cities focused across the United States of America and Indigenous nations across Turtle Island using restorative justice and land-based healing: the pattern is crystal clear, Mr. Speaker. When people have supports, when people have culture, when they have stability and treatment and they stop interacting with police on those issues, you create safety. If this government had invested in supportive housing, mental health care, youth services, and treatment, there would be no need for Bill 4 and no talk of these modern jails framed as compassionate care.

You know, Mr. Speaker, safety is created by stability, not by force. This bill consolidates provincial authority instead of empowering the municipalities, like you heard from my friend, instead of empowering treaty nations, instead of empowering Indigenous led safety models or community organizations. We could have had a bill that was codeveloped with municipalities, with First Nations, with women who experience domestic violence, but we just have a bill coming from an authoritarian that is going to do absolutely no good to First Nations and Métis individuals.

Hay-hay. Nanaskamon, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Al-Guneid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 4, the bill that continues with this experiment of a provincial police force. This is the \$2 billion for New Police Badges Act. This legislation advances the next step of establishing the Alberta sheriffs police service.

Mr. Speaker, rural Albertans deserve genuine solutions to their safety concerns, not expensive bureaucratic experiments. Rural Albertans have serious public safety concerns. We acknowledge this, and this bill does not solve them. The UCP is continuing with this policing project with no public mandate, no detailed cost breakdown, and no credible evidence that it would enhance safety.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's communities thrive when we listen to local voices and prioritize real public safety needs. The UCP is forcing through massive police restructuring that nobody in Alberta has asked for or wants. Albertans have repeatedly rejected this plan, so how does the government justify proceeding with establishing this framework for a provincial police service when 86 per cent of Albertans want to retain the RCMP? How does the government justify that the rural municipalities will pay 82 per cent of this massive cost?

Don't take my word for it. Paul McLaughlin, the reeve from Ponoka county and the former president of the Rural Municipalities of Alberta, did the math for you, Mr. Speaker. I quote here Mr. McLaughlin's op-ed titled Stop Downloading Expenses onto Alberta's Municipalities.

8:20

With all the rhetoric related to unity, tariffs and other multiple black swans that have occurred in society today, I want to assert the right of municipalities to exist, unfettered by the actions of the provincial government.

I will take, for example, the ultimate downloading that has ever existed in the history of municipalities in Alberta (aside from dumping bridges on us). The 2024-25 police-funding model numbers have been updated to Ponoka County to the tune of \$776,302. Ponoka County had a population of 10,428 in 2024 and

that expense is \$74.44 per person. Importantly, there has been no change in service when the police-funding model was created . . .

But wait, we are not talking per-capita here; we are instead talking about assessment. So, this is where it gets stupid. Ponoka County has a tax bill of \$21 million based upon 3.7 billion dollars of assessment. Now, if you have ever been to Ponoka County, you would know that farmland is what we are, with beautiful rolling hills, fat cattle, wheatfields, and canola.

It is beautiful. I've been there.

Our total municipal tax for assessed farmland is \$639,150 and residential is \$4,112,522. Just the policing download alone is 112 per cent of farmland or 16 per cent of the residential tax. I want that to sink in.

He goes on then and he does more math for the province. This reeve from Ponoka urges the government to stop the download to municipalities, and he ends this op-ed with:

You want to grow Alberta's economy with rural Alberta? Stay out of our way. In my 18 years of elected office, I have never been treated as a child of the provincial government, until now. I have never seen [such a] large . . . provincial download, until now.

Enjoy your personal tax cut, Albertans; check out your municipal property taxes to find out where the money came from.

To quote the minister to Alberta's municipalities: "They're not required to be happy with the decisions that we make."

Maybe the MLA for Lacombe-Ponoka should take some notes today.

Mr. Speaker, the Rural Municipalities of Alberta have expressed the rejection of this provincial police force, specifically when Bill 49 was released: "Unfortunately, the Government of Alberta has yet to engage municipalities on how this . . . policing service may be a solution to addressing policing challenges."

And Elizabeth Manass from Calgary-Glenmore e-mailed my office and literally tells us:

Please work on issues that are actually important to Albertans like the cost-of-living crisis, affordable housing and groceries, adding jobs, making health care wait-lists shorter, and adding teachers to classrooms, and stop trying to emulate the social conservatism that is happening in America.

Rural leaders have rejected this plan. This is not serious. Polling after polling after polling tells us that Albertans prefer to keep the RCMP. The government has failed to engage municipalities and local leaders in rural Alberta in a meaningful way. They reject this costly plan. This bill is another excuse to create another Crown corporation. I really do not understand this UCP obsession with Crown corporations, Mr. Speaker. How many do we actually have now? Five? Six?

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta police force is an experiment. It is a duplication and a waste of public money, taxpayer money. Why isn't the UCP listening? Why are they spending \$2 billion on new police badges while Albertans are treading water with the cost of living, cost of groceries, cost of rent, and housing? Albertans have rejected this plan. The UCP should focus on Albertans' priorities.

I'm going to end with a quote from Tom, a constituent of Calgary-Glenmore, who says that

more than 80 per cent of Albertans polled on this issue agree. We do not support replacing the RCMP with an unproven, unnecessary, and untested new provincial police service. By launching the Alberta Sheriffs Police Service, it is clear you are not listening to or consulting us, the people who rely on the RCMP to stay safe. This idea has been raised before, and every time Albertans have pushed back. In 2021 your government's own report from PricewaterhouseCoopers showed that a new provincial police service would cost hundreds of millions to create. This time there is no report, no plan, and no real consultation with Albertans, the ones who will be footing the bill.

The UCP should listen to Albertans, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I cannot support this bill.

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

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak briefly to the Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2). At the beginning of my remarks I want to say that on this side of the House we fully support the changes and amendments insofar as they relate to Clare's law to protect victims and survivors of domestic violence. Myself and all my colleagues fully support that part of this legislation.

The minister in his remarks made a lot of absurd claims saying that the NDP wants to cut victims' services. In fact, that was the UCP government that raided victims' services, took money from victims, dismantled the existing victims' services, which nobody was asking them for, and still victims are struggling to find the support they used to get from victims' services. They also made claims around the NDP cutting police budgets. In fact, that was the UCP, the first government in the history of this province who cut almost \$13 million in the 2019 budget from Calgary police alone.

Then, I think, other changes the minister said are common sense that are contained in this bill, quite frankly, are not common sense; they are nonsense which nobody is asking for. Before the 2023 election it used to be in the Minister of Justice's mandate letter to look for policing options, an Alberta police force, and before the election they took that out of the Minister of Justice's mandate letter. During the election they didn't talk much about this Alberta police force, and as soon as they got elected, they started I guess betraying the social contract they entered into with Albertans during that election. They never got a mandate from Albertans to dismantle the RCMP in favour of a UCP police force.

Prior to that, before 2023, they also commissioned a report, the PWC report, PricewaterhouseCoopers report, which outlined what it will take to replace the RCMP with an Alberta police force. It was very clear that they will need at least 360-plus million dollars in just start-up costs, and Alberta will also be losing the 170-some million dollars that the federal government pays for the RCMP. In total, the price was pegged at \$734 million to \$754 million to dismantle the RCMP and replace it with a UCP police force. At that time, I think before going into the election, the UCP put that file on the back burner. Those numbers were too high. They didn't talk to Albertans about it, and many in Alberta Municipalities, many in RMA, Rural Municipalities of Alberta, both organizations representing rural municipalities, were against the UCP plan to dismantle the RCMP. However, they are doing it in the name of public safety.

They, I'm sure, know that they cannot police themselves out of the public safety concerns facing Albertans. All police chiefs will tell them that. Experts on public safety will tell them that.

8:30

There is a huge body of literature and research out there that if you want to be taken seriously, if you want to address public safety concerns, you have to focus on the social determinants of justice. Those social determinants of justice include income, employment, education, housing stability, and health care, as well as issues of racism and discrimination that can also lead to discrepancies in the legal system, in the justice system, that lead to overpolicing and access to resources such as fair representation.

When you look at the UCP, their record on these fronts, on social determinants of justice: I think Albertans are struggling to make ends meet. Their income has been stagnant, in particular for those earning minimum wage, since October 2018.

If you look at employment, we have seen unemployment go through the roof. Alberta cities, major cities like Calgary and Edmonton, are among the cities which have the highest unemployment. If we look at youth employment, it's at record levels. We have not seen this kind of youth unemployment in this province ever before.

If you look at education, Alberta is funding public education at the lowest level in the entire country.

If you look at housing stability, we have seen houseless in our major cities, in even rural communities under this government's watch. The minister will refer to how Alberta has turned into a mecca of housing start-ups. I don't know what that means, but houseless has never been this bad as it is now in this province.

And when you look at health care, just today they introduced a bill that will create a two-tier health care system, American-style health care system, that will make it more difficult for people to access health care, mental health services, and all that.

If the UCP wants to be taken seriously on the public safety front, they need to be investing in social determinants of justice, which they have completely ignored.

The last thing I would say is that we have talked about this plan. We do know that it's a costly plan. We do know that municipalities do not want it, and more importantly we do know that it will not help us improve public safety. Changing the colour of uniforms or stickers on the cars will not help us with public safety. From day one the UCP policy has been and continues to be political grandstanding and shifting blame onto others. They talk about bail reforms. Sure, I agree that the bail system needs to be reformed, but what they never tell Albertans is that our jails house 70 per cent of people who are in pretrial detention, meaning that they don't get a bail hearing in the time mandated by the legislation. Those things need to be addressed, but the UCP will never focus on that.

The other thing is that we also know that our justice system overdetains Indigenous people, Black people, persons of colour. The UCP will never talk about it. Instead, they might add some dog whistles in their throne speech blaming immigrants for a lot of the issues that are a direct result of UCP policies.

So, in short, I will say that this bill will not help us address public safety. If UCP members, if UCP backbenchers are serious about public safety, they need to be pushing their government to invest in employment, education, health care, housing stability, and in policies that address racism and discrimination in this province. At least I hope that those members who have been recalled will take their jobs seriously and they will try to listen to Albertans, at least this time, on this front.

I urge all members to vote against this bill. Again I reiterate my support for the Clare's law section of this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Member Gurinder Brar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Inderpal Singh came home late from a long Uber shift on the night of June 4, 2025, and parked his car in the driveway. He was tired but happy to meet his pregnant wife waiting to meet her husband. They were expecting a baby in a few days. The baby's cot was ready. They had bought nappies, baby suits, and the maternity bag was ready by the door, ready to go. Then all of a sudden gunshots were fired. Neighbours were terrified. Terror ran through the street.

His pregnant wife came outside. She saw something she would not have imagined in her wildest dreams or worst nightmares. Inderpal was lying in his car full of blood. She screamed for help. She begged for help. Her neighbours came and called 911. Help arrived, and they tried to give him CPR. They could not save him.

He was declared dead. A caring father, a hard-working son, and a loving father: a life lost to gun violence. A baby who was yet to be born lost their father. The community was in shock, in mourning, and left numb. No words can express the grief of the family, the pain of the community, and the pointlessness of the crime.

Albertans have never felt this unsafe. Gang violence, gun violence, gender-based violence: all are on the rise. In Calgary by the end of 2024 domestic violence victims were 14 per cent above the five-year average. Fourteen per cent, Mr. Speaker. For intimate partner violence in Canada, women, girls account for about 78 per cent of victims in 2023. In Calgary the picture is terrifying: violent crimes up 11.3 per cent in 2023, nondomestic robberies up 8 per cent, weapon-related incidents up 12 per cent. In Edmonton the picture is equally concerning: over 16,000 crimes in 2023, 16,000 violent crimes, up 6.6 per cent from the previous year, with gun incidents alone up 16 per cent. More weapons, more threats to Albertans' security, more unsafe streets, homes, and communities.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Enough of rising crime, enough of broken promises, and enough of government failure. This bill fails to deliver the core principle of the Alberta advantage, safety. Albertans deserve to feel safe in their homes and their communities and the places of worship. Lives, properties, and communities must be safe.

My constituents are telling me that they do not feel safe, Mr. Speaker. They send me videos of cars being stolen, homes being set on fire, gunshots on homes. They tell me that they have never seen a crime outbreak like this. They call it a crime epidemic. They ask me: what are we doing to make things better? How do we create a safer, more secure, and more stable society? This bill fails to address those questions.

However, there are three things, three vital ways that we can cure this problem. The first is crime-prevention programs. We know that investing in our communities is the best investment we can make. We can invest in gang intervention and youth violence programs. Comprehensive gang intervention programs combine targeted enforcement with community-led prevention. These initiatives not only identify the individuals driving the majority of violent crimes; they offer supports like exit strategies, job training, and counselling. These focused deterrence programs are delivered in partnership with police, social services, and community leaders.

8:40

One of the most famous gang violence reduction strategies is Operation Ceasefire in Boston. In the mid 1990s a working group of Boston police, federal agents, probation officers, and community street workers implemented this program. Not only did they tell gang members to end violence; they offered job referrals and social services. The results were dramatic: a 63 per cent reduction in youth homicide victimization. Cincinnati did the same thing. The city introduced the Cincinnati initiative to reduce violence, involving police, community volunteers, and social services. The result, Mr. Speaker: a 41 per cent reduction in group-related homicides. Stockton, California launched Operation Peacekeeper, including street outreach workers to mentor gang-prone youth alongside focused police work. Gun homicides reduced by 42 per cent.

The second element is ending domestic violence. All women must feel safe at home, at work, and in communities. Clare's law is one way to make sure they get the information they need about their partners. Strengthening this law means strengthening our society. A society where a woman is safe is a society that reaches the heights

of progress. Canada as a country and Alberta as a province have a lot to do to make women more safe.

Clare Wood was murdered in 2009 by her ex-boyfriend with multiple prison sentences on domestic violence. When Clare repeatedly asked the police for help, they had no legal means to share the information. If this law had existed in 2009, Clare's life could have been saved. I'm glad that we are making progress on this so we can save so many other Clares of our society.

The third element is: keep the RCMP. One thousand nine hundred eleven RCMP cover 99 per cent of Alberta's geography, 660,000 square kilometres. Ninety-seven per cent of calls are answered within two minutes. Guess how many under one minute, Mr. Speaker. Eighty-seven per cent. More and more Canadians want to join the RCMP and serve our communities. Last year alone 17,500 RCMP applications were received. Over 3,000 of those applicants were Albertans, the highest in over a decade.

If there is anything that needs to be changed, it's this UCP government. This government has the wrong priorities, the wrong policies, and the wrong people in charge. The UCP is focused on making changes that give them more power, not what is right to do for Albertans. Sometimes they attack the Canada pension plan, other times the Canada Revenue Agency, and now it's the RCMP. Albertans have said no to all these policies multiple times. The UCP is the cause of the sickness in our society. We cannot possibly look to them to administer this cure. To the minister of public safety, who thinks replacing the RCMP will solve the problem, I say: keep your ears on the ground and listen to what Albertans have to say. Feel the pain of our communities. Open your eyes and see the failing communities.

Seventy-six per cent of Albertans in RCMP-served communities remain satisfied with the policing services they receive. Seventy-one per cent say that the public has not been properly consulted about replacing the RCMP. Eighty-one per cent agree that there are more important priorities for the province than changing these policing policies. During the Bill 4 presser the minister stated that he believed he witnessed strong support to move forward on this at the Alberta Next Panel's town halls. These events and straw polls could hardly be described as an accurate representation of the province, Mr. Speaker.

Let me share what Rural Municipalities of Alberta President Kara Westerlund has to say. She said that it's important for anyone starting conversations about policing changes to present accurate information. She said, and I quote: we don't have a policing problem in this province; we have a judicial problem. End quote. The UCP is more concerned with appearance than reality, more worried about creating the illusion that they are tackling crime, plus having limited impact as crime continues to go up, hurting everyone. We have big, big problems in Alberta today, and we need to recognize their huge scale with an equally huge response. I want to share a quote from Nelson Mandela. "Safety and security don't just happen, they are the result of collective consensus and public investment" in fairness, opportunity, and justice.

We can put crime to an end, we can put domestic violence to an end, and we can put the wrong priorities of the UCP to an end. To end crime, to end domestic violence, and to end the UCP's reckless priorities, we must end the UCP, and come 2027, Albertans will put this government to an end. No more chaos, no more corruption, no more cruelty. We can build a better future, Mr. Speaker. We can give people a life of dignity, respect, and hope. We can make our communities safe so that no Inderpal Singh ever loses life to gun violence, no wife loses a husband, and no yet-to-be-born baby loses a father.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any other speakers wishing to speak?

I have the opportunity for the hon. Deputy Premier and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services to close debate. We waive that.

The hon. Deputy Premier and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services has moved third reading of Bill 4, Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2).

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:47 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Batten	Chapman	Ip
Brar, Gurtej	Dach	Sabir
Calahoo Stonehouse	Ellingson	Shepherd
Ceci	Hoffman	Wright, P.
Totals:	For – 44	Against – 12

The Speaker: The motion is defeated. [interjections] Oh, no. It's carried. Sorry. Sorry, folks. You know what? I did bad. No, no, no. This is a mea culpa. The motion is definitely carried. My apologies.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 6

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

Ms Ganley moved that the motion be amended by deleting all of the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 6, Education (Prioritizing Literacy and Numeracy) Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2), be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the proposed screening assessment and reporting requirements are deeply ableist and will leave behind in their education thousands of children in Alberta, who are already struggling in overcrowded and undersupported classrooms in the public education system.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment November 18: Ms Ganley]

The Speaker: Okay. Sorry. There were people popping up. I didn't know who was talking. The hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington.

Ms Chapman: There we go. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Motion defeated. Motion carried. I get it. It's evening time, you know.

Are we on Bill 6, or . . . [interjections] We're on 6. Seven. No, 6. Six?

An Hon. Member: The sixth amendment.

Ms Chapman: The sixth amendment. I actually told my kids I would do that in here, so boom, check, done.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

All right. On to some actual business. Just to review for folks – I can tell I've got a real captive audience here, too – the amendment that we're on on this bill asks that the bill

be not now read a second time [as] . . . the proposed screening assessment and reporting requirements are . . . ableist and will leave behind in their education thousands of children in Alberta, who are already struggling in overcrowded and undersupported classrooms in the public education system.

Why did we need this amendment, Mr. Speaker? We have major concerns on this side of the House that this government is disregarding, teachers' assessments of what's going on with the kids in their classrooms. By standardizing these tests, these screeners, whatever you want to call it, literacy and numeracy assessments, by requiring that teachers deliver these tests to all children, well, that has a disproportionate effect on certain children. In this case we could be talking about children with ADHD, children with autism spectrum disorder, children with anxiety, and we know that this is a segment of Alberta's student population that is growing.

I'm going to pick on one school board simply because I happen to have their fact sheet close to hand here, but this is reflected certainly across all of our urban boards. Calgary Catholic school district estimates that – not estimates. I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker; I misspoke there. Calgary school district has the facts and figures to show that 1 in 3 students in the school board has complex learning needs, so when we talk about these assessments being ableist, we are talking about something that has an impact on an enormous number of students.

On the teachers' assessments it's been a real theme, I have found, for this government – certainly, we've seen it over the last few months – a disrespect, really, for teachers, for the expertise they provide, for what their professional duty is in the classroom. I want to just share a little bit about what some teachers have shared, sort of a broad level from some data that the ATA has collected from feedback. This is just from elementary schoolteachers, of course, because these assessments are where, again, we're talking about the K to 3 students.

Grade 3 and 4 teachers have concerns about the assessments, and what their concerns are kind of had three main categories identified. Seventy-one per cent believe that the material in the screeners is developmentally inappropriate. Of course, I have heard a number of reports from teachers on, particularly when we're looking at some of the vocabulary lists and the literacy screeners, that there are words on there that simply haven't been introduced to kids in these age groups yet. I mean, you know, when we're looking at the kindergarten list, I was just talking to a colleague about this is. Kids come into kindergarten, some of them, with nothing, right? These are kids who still need help zipping their jackets and opening their granola bars. They're learning the foundations of literacy here. So

developmental inappropriateness. Seventy-three per cent of teachers believed that these assessments were harming elementary students. This is reporting a negative impact on students' emotional well-being and high levels of anxiety, and that's related to the mandatory nature of the testing, Mr. Speaker. And 75 per cent of teachers: low value for student learning. The feeling is that repeating the test throughout the year, in particular, has no value at all for their students.

9:10

On assessments generally – I do love how thorough teachers are in the feedback they provide, and I do hope that the minister has reviewed the content, of course, that teachers have provided through the ATA about assessments.

Declaration on assessment.

This is from the ATA.

We, the teachers and school leaders of Alberta, believe:

- Assessment is about enhancing student learning. Its first task is to inform and help students grow and then to aid in teaching and learning.

Teachers are the assessment experts, and that makes sense, of course, Mr. Speaker. Teachers are front-line workers in the classroom. They are the ones who know their children, who understand what is developmentally appropriate for the class that's in front of them, and there's a strong feeling that teachers should take the lead in designing, implementing, interpreting, and communicating the evidence of learning. All of that tracks for me, and it is a piece that I believe is missing from this current set of assessments.

On that ableism or inclusion angle:

- Assessment must be fair, engaging and inclusive, giving every learner multiple ways to demonstrate growth.

That is seriously lacking with these assessments because, again, this is a standardized set of assessments. This is delivered to every child regardless of where they are in their learning journey, and there is no space, as I understand it, for any kind of adaptation to the student that's in front of a teacher, which is a shame, because it's the teacher who knows – right? – what it is that that student is capable of, where they might have the capacity to be challenged but where they already know that they need support.

That's the fundamental flaw in what this bill is proposing, of course, that testing without providing the resources that are needed to support the outcomes of those tests is a completely meaningless exercise. We've been doing that meaningless exercise with these literacy-numeracy assessments for a number of years now. I think we're on three years that these assessments have been in use in the classrooms. It does not appear to have informed this government's decisions when it comes to budgeting. Certainly, we know that we don't have the kind of resources that we need in our classrooms right now for complex learners. So I ask the question – and I look forward to hearing the minister's answer at another stage in this bill debate – what is the exercise of collecting this data for? Why are we collecting all this data on Alberta students? It's not being used to inform the resources that we need in the classroom. That much is clear. So what is it for? What are we doing this for?

I have, actually, a surprising number of e-mails about Bill 6, Mr. Speaker, but I have a great one from Katherine that I just wanted to read a little section of. Katherine writes to voice concern with Bill 6, which requires testing and evaluation without also providing supports for kids who may not perform well and require early intervention. There are already too many kids not receiving the proper support due to funding cuts in public education from 2019 to 2025. Katherine also asked for the minister to sit down and to speak with educators working in the public system and ask them

what would actually help and asks him to then write a bill about that, which I think is a great suggestion, Katherine. Thank you so much for writing in.

I'm going to pick on another school board, because CBE actually produced a great resource to talk about what that complexity piece looks like in the classroom right now. I'm so thankful that school boards – I mean, I know the government supports free speech of school boards and trustees. Certainly, I know that they would never do anything to limit the ability of school boards to communicate with the public. I thank the school boards for doing so because we're left in the dark a lot of the time, Mr. Speaker, about what exactly is going on in our classrooms because, of course, the government decided not to track or report any data on that.

CBE has a really nice little resource specifically talking about funding complexity in schools. Over the past four years the number of students with special education needs in the CBE has grown by 3,400 students. They now have 27,000 students in the system with special education needs. Again, these are only the coded children. There are, of course, a number of children whose parents don't have deep enough pockets to pay for the assessment required to get them a coding, and, of course, public schools have long been bereft of the funds that would be required to pay for that for the families who can't afford to pay for that out of pocket. So the actual number is still a little bit of a mystery to us. For CBE it works out to about 1 in 5, so about 19 per cent have specialized learning needs. Again, Mr. Speaker, in this amendment we're talking about the ableism, the inclusion needs in our classrooms here. These are the kids; 19 per cent have these specialized learning needs. Over 7,000 CBE elementary students, so right in this range of K to 3 we're talking about, are identified with ADHD, specific learning disabilities, or both. Over 7,000 students who are going to be actively harmed by these literacy and numeracy assessments.

Now, if we want to look at what is actually required to fund complexity – certainly, this is a question that I get a lot. You know, I don't have the resources of the ministry behind me to answer the question: what would be required? What's that magic dollar number that we need to address complexity? Well, CBE very nicely did the math for me here. This is just a single school board, now the biggest school board in the province, of course, but their estimate is \$148 million more. That's what they need to address complexity. That's funding to support students with severe learning needs and some specialized environments.

Fifty million dollars more to support complexity in the regular classroom. Of course, we have children ranging on a spectrum in the complexity of their need, from severe, who are maybe going to require those specialized environments, to the mild and moderate, who can probably be accommodated in a standard classroom but with some support. Thirty million dollars more: now, this is specific to fund infrastructure to support neurodiverse learners. Of course, these are learners who really work a lot better in a more controlled environment.

Then \$18 million more to transport students with complex learning needs. This was one of the most interesting things to me: transporting students with complex learning needs. First of all, costs for transportation have increased 43 per cent over the last six years, and, no, the government's funding grant for transportation has certainly not increased 43 per cent over the past six years. What the transportation grant provided by this government gives to CBE is \$13 million. The actual cost of transporting students is \$31 million. Where does that extra – I want to say \$27 million, but I'm wrong; it's \$17 million – \$17 million come from? Well, that comes right out of parents' pockets, of course, at a time where Albertans are struggling. They're struggling to keep their head above water.

We have major issues in terms of cost of living. We have a government that's not pulling the levers that they could to bring down costs on insurance, on utilities, and they're certainly not doing anything to bring down costs on student transportation, Mr. Speaker. They're not providing anywhere close. They're not even providing half of what it costs to transport students.

Redirection of the funding. This \$50 million to support students and specialized . . . [A timer sounded] Oh, sorry; I ran out of time.

9:20

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. On amendment RA1, I will recognize the Minister of Education and Childcare.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Happy to rise today to speak to the Amendment on Bill 6. I'm rising and encouraging members to vote in opposition to the amendment brought forward regarding Bill 6 here. It's really quite interesting. The amendment that the opposition has brought forward, that they've tabled, claims that Bill 6 is ableist because it mandates universal screening. I have to say I think it's a profound and cruel misunderstanding of the moral and scientific imperative that really underpins the legislation that we've brought before this Assembly.

I want to talk a little bit more about why that is and what is truly ableist. I really ask that question in a little bit of a rhetorical way, but I wonder: the act of shining a light on a barrier to learning so that we can tear it down, is that ableist, Mr. Speaker? Or is the act of condemning a child to years of academic struggle, emotional pain, and falling further behind simply because we chose to remain blind to their needs?

This bill is not about labelling children at all, Mr. Speaker; it's about liberating them. It's about helping them and empowering them to succeed. It's about fulfilling our fundamental responsibility to ensure that every child in this province has a fair start regardless of what they bring to the table. This bill is the very definition of pro-equity and pro-child legislation. We're not legislating a challenge; we're legislating the remedy for a challenge. We must, of course, defeat this amendment and allow Bill 6 to proceed.

The core of our argument, Mr. Speaker, and the reason the opposition amendment cannot stand is because it's rooted in a lot of irrefutable data and on the benefits of early intervention. The debate is not a matter of ideology; it's a matter of science. Learning difficulties like dyslexia are neurological differences, and they're manifested in differences, of course, in processing language sounds. The science is really crystal clear on this matter. The window for effective intervention is really narrow in those circumstances. We know that the brain is most receptive to literacy intervention in the early years – scientific evidence is quite unanimous in this regard – more specifically, before the age of eight. That is our window to act. That is our window where we can have the most impact. Research from leading experts demonstrates that outcomes for reading skills are almost twice as good for children who receive targeted support in grade 1 and 2 compared to those who wait until grade 3. The earlier that we are able to provide an intervention the better, of course, for the children.

Now, what does it mean if we just waited until grade 3, Mr. Speaker? It means that a child has endured three years of failure; three years of sitting in a classroom watching their peers read effortlessly while they struggle, internalizing the crushing belief that they are not smart enough. By delaying identification we are not protecting the student. We are inflicting what experts call "cumulative problems," including significant anxiety, depression, and a loss of self esteem that can take years of costly therapy to repair. We have a moral duty to intervene early. The real fear is not that dyslexic people have to struggle with jumbled input, but that

they will quit on themselves before they even get out of school. Our goal is to ensure that they never reach that point of despair.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I must directly address the opposition's intellectual dishonesty claim that this bill is ableist. This is a claim made without facts, without empathy, and without consultation with the very people who stand to benefit the most. To claim that identifying a learning barrier so that we can immediately apply evidence-based support as ableist: it just defies logic.

What the opposition is advocating for is the status quo. This destructive wait-to-fail model is the truly ableist policy. The wait-to-fail model reserves help only for children who have struggled so profoundly that they are demonstrably behind their peers. That model is inherently inequitable. It exclusively benefits those with the means to afford private screening and tutoring, leaving low-income families and those in rural areas to languish, such as those in your riding, Mr. Speaker. They are the ones who truly suffer under our current regime.

Bill 6, through universal accessible screening, is the ultimate equalizer. It says that regardless of your postal code, regardless of your parents' bank account, we, the Alberta government will identify your needs and provide you with scientifically backed tools to help you succeed. This bill does not create disability; it recognizes a reality and finds solutions. Mr. Speaker, if you truly want to support all abilities, you must support the ability to read, the ability to learn, and the ability to thrive.

The opposition's claim is further discredited by the broad nonpartisan support that this approach has generated across Canada. This is not a rogue initiative that was dreamt up in a vacuum. It is a common-sense policy built on best practices and embraced by leading advocacy organizations. I can tell the Assembly that, unequivocally, Dyslexia Canada supports our work in this legislation. Their executive director Alicia Smith has publicly called early screening "a game changer" and "a significant step forward" towards literacy equity. When the leading national advocacy voice for dyslexia is standing behind us, how can the opposition claim to be speaking for the vulnerable? They, in fact, are actively undermining the very people they claim to protect.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, we are not acting in isolation. This work with respect to screening literacy and numeracy has now become a national movement. Our colleagues in the Manitoba Legislature have passed similar legislation. Bill 225, establishing universal early reading screening for students from kindergarten through grade 4, was passed unanimously by their Legislative Assembly. British Columbia also mandated literacy and numeracy screening from K to 3, and very recently officials from the government of Saskatchewan have reached out to Alberta to get more information about our approach to literacy and numeracy screening. This is a common-sense, compassionate approach now being adopted by governments across the country.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, let us address the opposition's insinuation that this bill mandates a rigid or uncaring approach. That is simply false and untrue. This bill is built on flexibility and professional discretion. The legislation specifically ensures that school boards, through their principals, retain the power to exempt any student from screening if they feel it is clinically or educationally inappropriate. For students with severe pre-existing diagnoses or those with significant language barriers where screening would be irrelevant or harmful, that professional judgment remains intact. This exemption proves that the intent is not blanket enforcement but targeted, caring identification informed by professional judgment.

Mr. Speaker, we've heard the science. Early intervention is twice as effective. We have demonstrated the moral failure of the wait-to-fail approach. We have shown the broad consensus among

advocates and other provinces across Canada. To those children who spend their evenings anxious about reading aloud, who hide their report cards and who believe they are lazy or stupid, we say, no, and we say no more. We see you. We understand you, and we are legislating the support that you deserve.

The opposition's amendment is a distraction. It is rooted in fear and ignorance, not in the reality of what is best for our children. I urge every member of the Assembly to reject their ableist amendment and vote for a bill that prioritizes literacy, numeracy, and, most importantly, the success of every child in this province. I encourage members to reject the amendment and pass Bill 6 to give every student the gift of literacy and the opportunity to unlock their full and brilliant potential.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

9:30

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise tonight and speak to Bill 6 and to, hopefully, create an opportunity to reach across the aisle in speaking to the reasoned amendment and convince a few folks that maybe they have the opportunity to be enlightened through this amendment and consider it as well. What the minister just said around wanting early intervention, wanting to have literacy and numeracy as a foundation: every educator and this caucus believes in that. What this bill does, though, is no such thing around early intervention. This bill is around assessment and assessment alone.

If the minister truly, through you, Mr. Speaker, wanted to enhance opportunities for early intervention, low enrolment in kindergarten and grade 1, the minister would have sat down and reached a deal with the teachers who were advocating for that very thing instead of bringing – well, not necessarily him but his cabinet bringing through the notwithstanding clause to use it against teachers to force an agreement which wasn't an agreement, which was legislated one-handedly onto teachers.

Mr. Speaker, what the minister said around wanting increased intervention I absolutely believe and agree with, but that is not what this bill does in any way, shape, or form. This bill is clearly around sitting kids down when they're in division 1 – in kindergarten, in grade 1, in grade 2, in grade 3 – and forcing a standardized, mandated test on all of them. The research is very clear that the most important thing to do when kids start in school at the beginning of the year, especially in division 1, is build relationships. Building relationships is foundational to having good classroom management, to having a good sense of community in your classroom, and to students having good academic opportunities throughout that year. What this model being brought forward by the minister does is it hinders the opportunity for those teachers to build those relationships with those children.

I'm sure all of us in this Legislature have had opportunities where we've spoken to teachers who work in the early years. Oh, pop quiz. You can't respond to it, but you can write down your answers. Pop quiz. How many of my family members, in my nuclear family that I grew up in, trained as teachers? (A) my dad, (b) my mom, (c) myself, (d) all of the above. Write down your answers, friends. A couple of other questions. Another one: where did the hon. member grow up? Write down your answers. (A) Kinuso, (b) Castor, (c) Altario, (d) Edmonton. Okay; that's the second question. Third question: how many degrees does the member have? (A) religion, (b) math, (c) education, (d) all of the above.

Okay. The answers to the questions – I'm sure everyone is sitting here with bated breath. I will not mark them through a Scantron

because I know that some members of this place don't trust technology to mark, but I will say that in my experience, having trained as a teacher, my dad also being a teacher, my mom also being a teacher – so the answer to that was all three of us – the Scantron was more reliable than me at 10 p.m. marking standardized tests or multiple choice tests. I will assure you of that. Sometimes those dots move on a piece of paper when you've been marking 40 papers.

The answer to towns I grew up in: all but Edmonton. I grew up in the rural communities that everyone over there likes to talk about: Kinuso, Castor, Altario. I loved my experiences, and what brought us to those communities was public education. My dad wanted to pursue an administrative opportunity, and there was a teacherage, public housing, socialized housing, for him to be enticed to go to rural Alberta, which meant my mom could spend some time at home, and we got to have a great opportunity. First principalship was in Altario, which now has some new programming through the public education system.

Then the other one I talked about was degrees. I do have a degree in religion, hon. members. I do have a degree in math. I do have a degree in education and a master's in education. I say this not to gloat. I say this to say that people spend their lives dedicated to the study of education. I know the hon. minister has a PhD. Not in education, but he has a PhD. These are things that people are committed to, and for a government to come into this place and say, "You know what? We know what's best; we're going to tell you that every kindergarten teacher needs to spend less time in their classroom with their class and more time executing one-on-one standardized tests" is so counter to all of the research, Mr. Speaker.

The research shows that when you do formative assessments at the beginning of the year, it can be very rich and really help your pedagogical strategies. But what is being pushed here is more of a standardized, Fraser Institute style of ranking kids and ranking children. I will tell you that one thing that I think the minister and I definitely agree on is that when kids have been told that they are not smart, it is really hard to convince them otherwise.

What these tests do is in div 1 – we've got lots of documented evidence about kids, particularly kids who are learning English, being forced to sit and read aloud when they cannot read. Forcing children to sit down and be shamed and embarrassed when their teachers know – teachers know at the beginning of the year, and they do their own formative assessments in a really ongoing way. And I love summative assessments, too. I'm a big fan of knowing where we're at in relation to the curriculum but not for the purpose that the minister brings to this place. If he actually wanted to put those initiatives in place to make sure that we could focus on literacy and numeracy, he would have sat down and reached a collective agreement with the teachers that he took the human rights away from using the notwithstanding clause, Mr. Speaker.

I will touch on a few other things why the reason for this amendment is absolutely sound. This legislation should not proceed at this time because it has not been thought through. If it was thought through, there would be money to actually support the types of intervention that are so well documented in being effective. I was the chair of the Edmonton public school board before I came to this place, and I will say that programs that have both inclusion and programs that have specialized focus on helping kids get to and exceed their grade level are worth their money 10 times over. As the minister said, when we do early intervention in a focused way, we get much better outcomes in terms of high school completion and in terms of income earning ability. Those kids who we've put that focused attention on through finances, through investment, not just through doing a test: you actually have to invest in making sure

that they have other opportunities to receive the levelled, scaffolded supports that they need to be able to get up to grade level.

When I think about King Edward academy here in Edmonton public, for example: a very small program – a very, very small program – with transportation costs covered. Kids come from all over the city. They're working in very small groups with teachers who are expert teachers in their field, and the goal is to get them back up to and exceeding grade level – they have to be behind by at least two grades before they can be admitted – and then getting them back into their community school with the skills they need to be successful. That program has shown to be effective in a multitude of ways, in a multitude of studies, and the government would be wise to look at it and find ways that they can invest in it. Right now the way they pay for that program is by taking money out of other schools to put it into that school in Edmonton public.

So when the minister brings in legislation around children not being called by their preferred name, you know what, Mr. Speaker? In Edmonton I'm not worried about children being called much at all because when I look at classrooms with 40 or more students and teachers teaching four for four, learning the names of the kids in the classroom is a real challenge. If the minister actually wanted to focus on achieving the things that he's outlined in this bill, there would be a money bill coming forward. There would be a collective agreement coming forward, and there would be an investment in these children to make sure that they can achieve their outcomes.

The other reason why I want the government to take this opportunity to pause, take a breath, and reflect on where they're at in terms of the education system is because the first thing the government did just prior to this session, actually, is announce a grandiose book banning for the province of Alberta. What a train wreck and mess that was. Somebody in the Premier's office or the minister's office thought they knew better, thought they knew what kids should be allowed to read and not allowed to read and that they'd go out there and they'd show everyone that teachers were terrible people allowing awful things to be in schools, and everyone would side with the government over teachers because who would trust teachers? Obviously, the government would be the trusted authority. Not so, Mr. Speaker. The book ban attempted by the current education minister was an embarrassment across this nation.

Then I happened to be – I think it was two weeks ago. We had the Book Publishers Association of Alberta in, and the book that I picked up – every MLA had an opportunity to pick up a book – is called *Dear Sir, I Intend to Burn Your Book*, a book written about whose voice it is when governments decide to pull books from schools to limit the amount of access kids can have to literature. What types of authors are actually having their books pulled? It is often equity-seeking authors. The clearest example in this is around books being pulled for using language that some find offensive, not understanding the historical context or who the author is. It's almost always Black authors who get books pulled from libraries when people take a rigid rule around specific language being included or excluded from libraries.

9:40

The second thing this government did, of course, was sit on their hands for three weeks while a teachers' strike was under way, teachers who had no strike pay, teachers who knew that they indeed would have to be losing money out of their pocket. But they did that because they knew that education, public education, was too important for us to squander on this generation or the next. They were willing to take that financial hit. They were willing to leave the classroom, and I will say, as somebody who trained as a teacher and who loved teachers, both my parents, it takes a lot to make a

teacher leave their children in that classroom and go out on a sidewalk. That is not something that anyone aspires to. When you pursue a career in education, you do so – and I will argue in health care, too – because you care about people, you want to be part of a caring profession, and you want to have a chance to make things better for the next.

Mr. Speaker, the teachers' strike was an embarrassment, again, on a national level. Book ban, number one; teachers' strike, number two. Then the government comes up with a great solution. What they're going to do is bring in the notwithstanding clause and use it against teachers, something that had never been used by the Alberta government before. Never. They talked about it. They talked about it with Vriend, they almost did it there, but at that time Premiers actually cared about the public opinion, and Ralph Klein backed off and they did not bring it in. This Premier brought it in, used it against teachers, and now is using it against children.

Mr. Nicolaidis: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: A point of order has been called.
The Minister of Education and Childcare.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Nicolaidis: I'm just listening very carefully, Mr. Speaker. I know that the NDP has brought forward this amendment stating that Bill 6 is ableist. I've been listening carefully for the past several minutes. I haven't heard anything in the member's comments – she was just talking about the strike, the notwithstanding clause, several other matters that are completely unrelated to the amendment that they brought forward. I'm happy to hear their arguments and reasons as to why we should support their amendment if they want to articulate them.

The Acting Speaker: The Deputy Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister raised the point of order, but I didn't hear any citation. He just didn't like the comments, and he thought if he doesn't like the comment, that's a point of order. It's not.

What I can, I guess, deduce from minister's argument is that he might have been thinking to raise relevance. I think the rules around relevance – I would quote from chapter 13 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, which talks about repetition and relevance in debate. I'm quoting from chapter 13. "The requirement that speeches remain relevant to the question before the House flows from the latter's right to reach decisions without undue obstruction and to exclude from debate any discussion not conducive to that end." Then it goes on to say, which is the most relevant to this argument, that

it is not always possible to judge the relevance . . . of a Member's remarks until he or she has spoken at some length or even completed his or her remarks. The Speaker must exercise his or her discretion: if the rules are applied too strictly, they have the potential for severely curtailing debate.

I think the member built on her background in education, her experience as a public school trustee, and she was essentially talking about what's included in the bill and how it's not followed up with the money. I think she was clearly talking about the amendment that we are presenting about why this bill should not proceed. She was well within the parameters of that amendment, and I don't think that even on relevance a point of order argument is made out here. As I said earlier, the minister didn't cite any

standing order, and I think not liking somebody's debate, somebody's point, is not a point of order in this House.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: I am prepared to rule, and I am going to rule that this is not a point of order. I do believe that the member is speaking to context within the amendment with regard to our education system. It's a matter of debate, and I believe that the member can proceed and continue with her comments.

Debate Continued

Ms Hoffman: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and hats off to my colleague the Deputy Opposition House Leader. I do want to correct one thing that he said, though. I am confident that the education minister does like me, and I want to say on the record that I like him. I don't like this bill, and I don't like a lot of the ways he's been governing the education system, but I like him. I think that when he says we should be investing in the early years – he doesn't use investing. He talks about testing, magically meaning that we're going to be having better outcomes. It's just not true.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

My mom, for more family history here, spent most of her career, at the end especially, as a kindergarten teacher. At that time we called it ECS. My mom, if it helps you learn a little bit about my personality, said that it probably stood for "every child smiles." That's the job of a good div 1 teacher, to make sure kids go to school, that they feel good, that they feel capable, that they're excited to go back again tomorrow.

When I talked to my nephew today – he's in grade 1 – he told me that if he finishes his dot-to-dot and brings it into school tomorrow, he's going to get a prize. I remember those. You know, simple dot-to-dots. Figure out what the picture is. On his there were 253 numbers that he had to connect, right? I want kids to be excited about education. I want them to find ways to be able to challenge themselves to reach greater heights.

The reason why this amendment is absolutely in order and why all of us should be voting for it is because I think the government deserves an opportunity to get something right. This bill does not get it right. This bill talks about using a hammer, and if you have a hammer, everything looks like a nail. That's absolutely what's happening in this bill. The government has decided – they've already gone after, you know, teachers. They've already tried their book ban. That didn't work. The strike the government lost in an embarrassing way. The government wants to try to hammer one more thing. They'll use the words "literacy" and "numeracy" but put no money behind it, and they'll just talk about how tests can fix everything.

Well, Madam Speaker, the only point of a formative assessment is so you can do something to address the way you're teaching moving forward. If the government is giving none of those tools to teachers to be able to amend their practice, to have reduced class sizes, to have more educational assistants, to have more professional development, to be able to actually use that formative assessment to influence how they're going to conduct their practice for the remainder of the year, then it is absolutely a waste of our time in this place, those kids' time in those classrooms, their mental health. The ATA report that my colleague the Member for Calgary-Beddington so articulately went through really highlights the kind of pressure that this puts on kids who know that they're going to fail the test before they've even started. One of the biggest reasons for that is either cognitive challenges or language delays.

I will also say that most teachers by the third week of September know who needs that early intervention and know who needs more support. Again, if the government wanted to focus on closing those gaps between those who are learning at or above grade level and those who are struggling, one of the best things they could have done is vote for a bill that we brought forward around government funding and providing psycho-ed assessments for every child who needed one in the early years. That could have been something: psycho-ed assessments rather than a standardized test, where kids are going to be put forward and feel embarrassed by their inability to be able to succeed.

I will say that, especially having taught math, kids who know they're bad at math: it's so hard to convince them otherwise once they've made up their mind that they're not good at math. I'm sure that there are people in this place who also think they're bad at math, and I want them to know that with the right supports and the right intervention they don't need to be.

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

Ms Wright: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Happy to rise to talk to the reasoned amendment. As well, some comments about the bill I'm sure will make their way into my remarks.

I just wanted to begin my comments with some of my thoughts in terms of what a screener actually is and what it can actually do. A screener can certainly tell you something about where a child – I'm thinking of the LeNS, which is the literacy screener that the kids from kindergarten to grade 3 will be using. It can certainly tell you kind of if they understand that letter-sound alignment, if they're getting some of the basic understanding of phonics and phonemes and that sort of thing, but what it cannot and should not be used for – and this is also part of research, Madam Speaker – is a diagnostic assessment. While it can give you a little bit of an idea in terms of where to go with that child, it is not meant as any sort of a diagnosis.

9:50

That's one of the parts of this in terms of the bill itself, which is why, of course, we're asking for the reasoned amendment, that I think is really, highly problematic. Without the ability to do that diagnostic assessment, which my colleague just talked about, without the ability to have intervention, without the ability, if necessary, to go for that further reading specialist test and perhaps a psychological assessment, you won't know if that child has some kind of a cognitive issue, if that child has a learning disability in either math or reading perhaps or if there's something else going on or if it's a simple gap. You won't know that, Madam Speaker. The screeners won't be able to tell you that.

What we know the screeners can do right now – and this is where I will inject a few teacher voices here, as a few of my other colleagues have done. What the last couple of years of administering these screeners have told us is that there is indeed a high negative impact in terms of how the kids feel about themselves. There is developmentally inappropriate content, and the way in which teachers are weighing that, Madam Speaker, is that they're looking at the curriculum and what the curriculum demands. I'm thinking in my head right now about the kindergarten curriculum, for instance. The screeners are demanding that kids know things that they're not supposed to know until they are, in fact, in grade 1, not at the end of kindergarten but at the end of grade 1.

It seems to me that there's a bit of a disconnect between the screeners that are being offered and the curriculum which is being taught in the schools. That, to me, is a real problem. That indeed

also speaks to that limited value of some of these assessments and some of the problems, in fact, that teachers and kids have been experiencing over the last couple of years that the assessments have been used.

Teachers have also, Madam Speaker, pointed to a disproportionate impact in terms of vulnerable populations. This is where we really get into the nature of the amendment as well, where they say that English language learners and students with exceptionalities still need to do the test even if they cannot really access or respond to them. I can tell you, having given screeners in the past, that there's always a point at which, you know, you can stop the test, but the trouble is that student has already started the test, and at that point of stopping the test, that particular child already knows in their own head that they have failed the test. I can assure you that is what a kindergarten, grade 1, grade 2, grade 3 student is thinking automatically. If you've had to stop that test too early, they are thinking automatically that they are not worthy. That's a problem.

I think I talked earlier about a grade 3 student that I had at one point, who was supposed to do a provincial achievement test, and she was worried. The teachers here talk about anxiety. She was an ELL student, had recently arrived in Canada, had some measure of English but it certainly was by no means that academic language that's necessary for this sort of a standardized test, Madam Speaker. She was worried that she wouldn't be able to go on to grade 4. She was worried what her parents were going to think of her if she failed the test. It didn't matter what I said. I couldn't convince her that she was still a worthy student. This is what she now believed of herself when she was eight years old.

Teachers have also said that for students with complexities these assessments are stressful and disheartening, and it feels impossible and unfair. I will just say at this point too that there are screeners that teachers are doing right now in kindergarten that don't just measure literacy. They also measure other things that we all know we expect kids coming out of kindergarten to have learned. There is a test called the EYE. Some teachers will call it the EYETA. Essentially, it's an early years evaluation teacher assessment that measures where the child is on a spectrum in terms of five different domains: physical development, awareness of self and their environment, social skills behaviour, approaches to learning, cognitive skills, and language and communication.

This sort of test, which is often given at the beginning of the year, gives teachers a sense of where those kids are right now, where they entered kindergarten, and, again, where those gaps might be. But it isn't simply about numeracy. It isn't simply about literacy. It really, Madam Speaker, is about the whole of the educational experience that that child can experience and expect in kindergarten.

I also will add that unlike the screeners that will soon become mandatory, sadly, these sorts of EYE tests will often lead to a really comprehensive assessment that is done by a speech-language pathologist. That speech-language pathologist, that SLP, is often – I always thought of them as that first line of defence because indeed, they will often go through many of the phonemic awareness issues and that sort of thing, and they will really be able to pinpoint exactly where that child is. It isn't this sort of generalized screener that might give you that information. The sort of more holistic screener is more likely to give you that information because it's simply more contextual.

Now, when I think about the LeNS, the letter name and sound test, that will be presented and is being given to children, one of the things – and I know that the minister and my colleagues have pointed it out – talked about intervention. Absolutely. It can point to small measures of gaps and that sort of thing, but, again, it's not meant to be a diagnostic tool. If it can't be used as a diagnostic tool,

I do wonder where the efficacy is in it. There needs to be some sort of kind of path forward for that teacher.

I do understand that there are some intervention activities which come out of whatever the results happen to be for that particular child, but, again, those intervention activities, Madam Speaker, are only as good as if the intervention can actually exist in a school. And in a school that is overpopulated, in a school that doesn't have daily access to a speech-language pathologist or an occupational therapist or a psychologist to be able to do those more in-depth assessments, the intervention probably isn't happening. If you don't have an extra EA, if you don't have an extra teacher to offer that intervention that's required to fill whatever that gap happens to be, the intervention, first of all, probably won't happen but is little more than useless, which is unfortunate. It is. That's the situation that teachers find themselves in right now.

Even if they do the screeners and even if they do the EYE and even if they do all sorts of formative and summative assessments in their classroom, it's all for naught, Madam Speaker, if there's nothing to support those kids who need support. If those kids who need that more in-depth psychological assessment or that more in-depth reading test can't get those more formal assessments done, then there cannot be a diagnosis of a condition like dyslexia, which I will say is not funded at all within the special-needs code. If we're not providing all of the supports, then why are we making all of the kids do these screeners multiple times every single year?

If the government was truly interested in ensuring kindergarten students, grade 1 kids, 2s, and 3s were making the literacy and numeracy benchmarks, I would suggest that one of the easiest ways to do that – and I know the recent classroom complexity report talked about it – is the re-establishment of program unit funding, which was cut by this government in 2019-2020. It was decimated despite the fact that teachers and administrators working within those programs and paraprofessionals like those SLPs and OTs told this government that if you do this, then what we will start to see is that kids' literacy scores will drop, their numeracy scores will drop. And what do you know, Madam Speaker? It's actually happened. Those interventions that should and could occur when these children are two, three, four, and five years old weren't able to happen anymore because of what happened to PUF. That would seem to me to be a relatively easy response to some of this difficulty.

Another response might be to increase the seats at universities for SLPs and OTs and PTs and psychologists and psychiatrists. One of the things that always caused me a great deal of frustration when I was teaching as well as being an assistant principal was the fact that at IPAS over at the Glenrose there was one psychiatrist – that's it – for all of the children who needed to have a formal assessment as to whether or not they might be autistic. One psychiatrist and a wait-list, even when I was teaching, Madam Speaker, very, very close to two years. That's unconscionable. It means that those kids, wherever they happen to lie, are not getting the support that they deserve.

Not only that, but one of the things that – and this, I guess, is really speaking to some of what the minister talked about in terms of the universality and the need to have universal screeners. He mentioned dyslexia and kind of the diagnosis of dyslexia. As I've mentioned, you cannot diagnose dyslexia from the LeNS. You can't diagnose it from the EYE. You can't diagnose it from Brigance. You can't diagnose it from Schonell. You can't diagnose it from all of these screeners. It can only be diagnosed by a person who can actually do that, like a psychiatrist or a reading specialist or a psychologist, Madam Speaker. But if these people don't exist, those diagnoses won't happen.

10:00

Certainly dyslexia is one of the more complex learning disabilities that's out there. I might add as well that in the preservice end of becoming a teacher, teachers do not know generally how to intervene for a child who's received that diagnosis of dyslexia. It's one of those more complicated diagnoses, but imagine if teachers received that training. Imagine if teachers received the support. Imagine if they received the materials necessary, and then imagine if generally across all of Alberta dyslexia was actually properly funded. It would make a change. That would make a change, not doing a screener, Madam Speaker.

In terms though of the specifics of screening for dyslexia, there is an article that was published just a few days ago, 2025, in the *Annals of Dyslexia*, and it talks about: not-so-universal literacy screening, a survey of educators reveals variability in implementation. What they have found, Madam Speaker, is that even with universal screeners as they're being offered there are real problems in terms of the implementation, and it isn't all just down to the teachers. Some of it is because the kids themselves, as we talked about, are inherently complex human beings, and they come to us with those complexities. If we don't understand what those complexities are, we are indeed doing them a service when we offer them a particular screener.

Certainly in their report they talk about training quality, which I just talked about. My colleague from Glenora talked about professional development. There also need to be practice opportunities and feedback systems. Teachers need support if we're going to be asking them to administer these screeners, and that support right now, Madam Speaker, just doesn't exist.

Not only that, in terms of kids who are ELLs, there are assessment challenges, and 92 per cent of the respondents who responded to this particular survey reported that ELL students were screened in their schools, yet 22 per cent of those folks believed that those students could not be reliably identified for literacy difficulty. Significantly, 40 per cent of respondents incorrectly marked linguistic variations due to ELL status as incorrect. This is because, although teachers are lovely and teachers are well meaning and teachers are very well educated, teachers don't know some of those specifics, Madam Speaker.

I can remember filling out the ELL reports and having to go back to the person at Edmonton public who was kind of in charge of our own professional development where ELL kids were concerned, and every single year I would have to ask questions because there were things I just didn't know. I wanted to make sure that I got that ELL assessment right for that child so that I wasn't doing that child a disservice.

What this amendment is really about, Madam Speaker, is doing these children a disservice. I will say as well, and this is where I'll come back to that issue of screeners: one of the jobs that I had a few years ago was as a literacy person in a school. It didn't mean that I knew everything about literacy, but what it did mean was that we were able to talk to other people in our catchment, in our area and bring in some literacy specialists. I can remember that a friend of mine came in from Right to Read, which is a Learning Disabilities Association of Alberta's program. She went through not just a day or two of training; she went through some really, really comprehensive training, and then it ended up being a particular program for our grade 1 students. She took the better part of two weeks to assess not all the grade 1 students but only some of them. The information that she . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Member Ellingson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am happy to rise and speak to the amendment to Bill 6 and agree with the amendment that this bill should proceed no further. I have to say that as I stand and speak to the amendment this evening, I'm humbled by the fact that I am following two of my caucus colleagues who are teachers and who know a great deal about the topic of discussion.

I think they have raised some excellent points, certainly really landing on and hearing that, you know, the minister talked about how this is an investment into the supports for kids. This is not an investment into the supports for kids. In fact, that's what is really lacking in Bill 6. It doesn't actually do anything to support the kids. There's a lot of talk about identification of the needs for supports, but the actual supports aren't in Bill 6, which is making the amendment to Bill 6 very relevant.

You know, there are also a lot of academic references that discuss the lack of clear conclusions on the effectiveness of screening in the early years, particularly with children with disabilities, which again brings us back to the amendment. My colleague just referred to – interestingly, we both did this independently – a study published in the *Annals of Dyslexia*. The minister did also refer to the supports that he was getting from the lead for Dyslexia Canada, but what he didn't talk about was that the dyslexia journals that are talking about this topic really talk a lot about the consistency in the screening but also the interventions that are offered, that without the identification and the provision of those interventions, the screening does not achieve what we're trying to achieve.

You know, many of the states in the United States have enacted legislation. The minister talked about provinces that are ahead of Alberta in this. Most of the states have enacted legislation mandating universal screening for literacy and numeracy in grades K to 3. I expect that, just like American-style private health care, that this government is motivated to follow the lead of the United States despite the fact that the evidence shows that the United States has lower educational outcomes than Canada.

Madam Speaker, the study that I'm referring to looked at the practices in 251 schools across 39 states. They found an incredible degree of variability in screener selection, in the administrative practices around the screening, the testing environments for the screening, trainer quality, scoring accuracy, and the use of the results to guide intervention. If the members opposite, if the minister had been reading the e-mails that have been sent to him that were copied to my office, teachers are raising these issues that they have not been provided additional training. They are identifying inconsistencies in how we're scoring in these screenings. They are identifying that they're not getting information back from the department on how these screening assessments are being used. They're saying that they're not getting guides to what to be done with the screening assessments. They're saying that there is no intervention. In fact, that's what they were saying when they went on strike. They are lacking the resources to support children in our schools, and Bill 6 isn't doing anything to help that.

This is not the only study, Madam Speaker, that comments on the ineffectiveness of screening if there is not clear interpretation of the results with planned interventions and the supports there for those interventions. Many educators in the study indicated that they received insufficient training and professional development in conducting the screening and that this also results in the ineffectiveness of the screening. This was particularly pronounced in children with disabilities and in neighbourhood schools with lower socioeconomic status.

Madam Speaker, without the training and the supports and the planned interventions and actually coming in with those interventions, the outcomes in the children could be worse. The

minister talks about how children are feeling like they have failed. These screeners are amplifying children feeling like they are failing with nothing there to pick them up and help them move forward, nothing there to help teachers pick them up and help them move forward.

10:10

Of course, this government is going down this path without having developed any of the necessary training for teachers, without the foresight to ensure consistency in measuring and reporting, and certainly without the resources and plans in place to act on the screening, Madam Speaker. If this government were serious about improving outcomes for our kids, they would fund public education so teachers had the resources they needed to teach the kids.

Teachers already know the children that are struggling in their classrooms, and they wish that they could help, but they don't have the resources to do so. That's why they went on strike, Madam Speaker, and unfortunately the government sent them back without doing anything to help them.

This government voted down a bill brought forward by the Alberta New Democrats to return to measuring class sizes and complexity. The government voted it down, and now they stand and say that they care about classroom sizes and complexity, committee referring to committee.

This government voted down a bill brought forward by the Alberta New Democrats to ensure that children who needed psycho-ed assessments for learning disabilities could get them. Madam Speaker, if we did more, if we really cared about intervention, then why aren't we funding and providing the resources there for kids to get psycho-ed assessments? If we were doing that, then we could move mountains in helping these children move forward with the curriculum that is put before them.

What is the point of assessing children for literacy and numeracy when you don't even make sure that we've assessed the children for learning disabilities? It doesn't make any sense, Madam Speaker, which is why I support the amendment to this bill. What can we possibly hope to do with the information that was gathered when we know that the data is flawed, that we're testing kids without having done the appropriate assessments first, as my colleague from Beverly Clareview was mentioning, that these assessments aren't the assessments needed to know if a child has dyslexia? Unless we know that that child has dyslexia, how are we bringing forward the correct interventions and supports for that child, making these screenings useless and potentially damaging?

Madam Speaker, according to the ATA, these screening assessments are causing kids higher levels of anxiety, lower levels of engagement, and this is worse with children with disabilities. That's why in our amendment we say that this legislation is ableist. Children today that aren't responding to input will regress even further. What is the government doing with the information that they already have to address classroom complexity? The answer to that is nothing. Teachers already know the children that are struggling, that are performing below grade level. Teachers have already told us that the level of assessment is inappropriate, and now we mandate these teachers back to work when they were raising these issues while they were on strike. We're refusing to even acknowledge the challenges that are being faced.

Here's a note that was sent to the minister of education and copied to my office from a concerned teacher, Madam Speaker.

I am writing to you again concerning the mandatory screening assessments that have been implemented this year, this is from the spring,

as it is . . . May, and I have again completed the screeners. I have already sent many e-mails about my feelings on this and received no response nor what seems to be [an] understanding [for] what this is doing to the system. I do not feel teachers nor the ATA are being listened to. We have explained, shared, and advocated for these to be removed, and nothing is being done.

To finish the year off I again had to assess my students. Once more I took valuable teaching time. There were students who did not make the list who are still struggling. I already knew [who] the students [are] who are struggling. The data has been taking one to two months to come back to me, [and] at that point, we are at the end of the school year. Testing with no extra funding [or supports] is not acceptable. If you are looking for money to put into the system, deleting these screeners would be a way to find some money

to put money where it's going to be useful in the system, Madam Speaker.

This teacher and constituent goes on to say that they will "continue to advocate for the removal of these until it happens. I would love to meet with you or discuss over the phone." Well, we could meet this teacher's suggestions if we voted yes to this amendment.

I have another letter from a teacher who lives in Calgary-Foothills. These letters comment on all children. Teachers and the ATA have expressed their concerns that the consequences are more pronounced with children with disabilities. Implementing these tests to all students, as the bill doesn't make any accommodations for any children, will be detrimental. Children will experience higher levels of anxiety. The feeling of separation and not being smart will be more pronounced, causing irreparable damage to the learning that is still to come in their lives. This teacher says that they've taught grades 1 and 2 for the last three years and they have had first-hand experience with the testing process that the government implemented.

These tests take up almost an entire month from start to finish to complete . . . this means that the test [is] happening three times a year, [over] three months of valuable instruction time [that] is being used up to assess these students.

This makes zero sense, Madam Speaker. These are not developmentally appropriate. This teacher goes on to say that she was shocked to see that kindergarten was a part of the testing process at the beginning of the kindergarten year.

Kindergarten [isn't even] mandatory in Alberta, and you are implementing a standardized [assessment]? In grade 1 [they] found the tests [were] stressful and upsetting, and I cannot imagine a child in kindergarten doing these [screeners]. I have said these words about every curriculum and now these tests.

This brings me to the next point, Madam Speaker. This teacher goes on to say,

the actual assessments do not directly correlate to the curriculum, math specifically. On this note, things that have not yet been taught are being assessed at the beginning of the year. As an example, [in kindergarten], number lines to 100 and finding a number on the line. Timed addition and subtraction.

These children haven't even been exposed to this curriculum yet, and they're being screened.

Madam Speaker, the teacher goes on to say,

assessment for learning: the standardized test does not give teachers information about students to help them better . . . by the time [that] the assessment data is sent back to the teachers, it is no longer relevant. I also am unsure about parents, when do parents receive this assessment information. Many teachers are not providing [that information] to parents. Therefore, if it does not help teachers assess students and better teach them and is not informing parents, what is the value [of these screeners]?"

Madam Speaker, the teacher goes on to say, “standardized tests do not make smarter kids.” They don’t reduce class sizes. They don’t provide the EA supports that are needed for these kids.

Madam Speaker, teachers have been calling for help, literally calling the minister’s office and asking for help, but those calls are falling on deaf ears. This government forced them back to work without making any changes to make classroom conditions better. Bill 6 does nothing to make classroom conditions better or anything better for our children; therefore I support this amendment.

The legislation is ableist. The legislation is ignoring the differentiation and the complexities in our classrooms. Madam Speaker, quite frankly, we can do better. There are many proposals out there that we could be pursuing. I encourage everyone in this House to support the amendment.

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

Member Ceci: Thank you. I’ll support the amendment. Thank you very much to the Member for Calgary-Foothills for elucidating all those reasons why the amendment that was put forward by Calgary-Mountain View should be supported.

You know, I learned a great deal just listening to my colleagues who have the background of being leaders of school boards, teachers, principals. It’s not that I needed convincing that Bill 6 was a bad bill, but they provided a great deal of good information about why it should not be read a second time. Bill 6 should not be read a second time.

10:20

You know, the proof points for me, Madam Speaker are div – well, I learned that div 1 is a term used for kindergarten kids up to grade 3, I think. Div 1 kids really just need encouragement to get in there and learn every day, and you have to be a really special teacher to be able to have that level of understanding of what your young students need and to make them come back every day feeling like they’re fired up and want to learn the next thing.

The proof point for me was that the results of testing as proposed – and I was listening to the minister talk about them – aren’t tied to any mechanisms around funding the deficits that are found. We know that historically, as my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview talked about, PUF funding was that way of trying to address the shortcomings, or the deficits, that students would have. We know what happened to that, Madam Speaker, with the previous government to this one. It was unceremoniously cut, and EAs and others, psychoeducation assessment psychologists, were all fired by the previous government. So we see the deficit starting to accumulate, and the minister says that he wants to kind of get in there and find out what those deficits are. Well, you broke the system, or the previous government broke the system, and now they’re saying: let’s find out where it is in terms of the abilities.

The problem with Bill 6 is that not one more dollar will go into hiring people to make up for those deficits. As a result, we’ll find children who are stressed as a result of testing. They’re discouraged, despondent, and that’s not a good learning environment. I think what I’ve heard from my colleagues on this side is that there’s reason enough to not read this a second time, to go back, to take another look, and do better as a government and bring back bills that have money bills attached to them so that our students can get the support they need and dedicated resources can be directed towards helping kids achieve the goal we all want for them, and that is that all students are successful.

We’re not finding that in anything that Bill 6 has before us. We’ve put a reasoned amendment to raise that flag and to do

better. With that said, I’ll sit down and let my colleague take it over.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise tonight to deep-six Bill 6. There are plenty of reasons why that should be done. I notice that the minister of education is deeply hurt when he is hearing the word “ableist” to describe his bill, but, in fact, that is definitely what we’re talking about. The Assembly is of the view that the proposed screening assessment and reporting requirements are deeply ableist. According to the minister, that’s absolutely wrong. However, you know, in this Legislature and across the province, people have rightly come to the conclusion that they should be asking: who’s next?

First, teachers in this province were denied their constitutional and fundamental rights to strike and to reach a fairly negotiated agreement. Next thing you know, trans youth were denied their fundamental Charter rights. “Who’s next?” is the question that everybody in this province is asking, Madam Speaker. Who’s next to be denied their fundamental rights? As the Member for Edmonton-Glenora has said earlier: let’s connect the dots. Why does the government wish to take control over who is, quote, unquote, able to continue in their classroom? Who belongs? Who doesn’t? Who needs to be separated from the class for, quote, unquote, special attention?

The government’s underlying message behind Bill 6, in my view, Madam Speaker, is why it must not now be read a second time. Is it the students’ fault for falling behind? It seems to be what the government is saying. Divide the class into achievers and nonachievers. Blame the lower achieving students for being there. That’s ableism in its most raw form.

Madam Speaker, if we need further definition about ableism, I can refer to definitions offered by Ableism 101, a group out of Chicago who talks about ableism being “the discrimination of and social prejudice against people with disabilities based on the belief that typical abilities are superior. At its heart, ableism is rooted in the assumption that disabled people require ‘fixing’ and defines people by their disability. Like racism and sexism, ableism classifies entire groups of people as ‘less than’ and includes harmful stereotypes, misconceptions, and generalizations of people with disabilities.” So ableism in its most pure and raw form is what Bill 6 is all about.

Now, where does the government ultimately intend to go with this intentionally targeting bill? In years past we all know where the school system found space for children with special needs, where they were located. Outside of it, Madam Speaker. They were not included. Outside looking in, that’s where children with special needs were placed. They didn’t belong in the school system. Now today, thankfully, those folks, all children are in our classrooms as valued participants. Perhaps until now.

Bill 6 begs the question: why? Well, perhaps the UCP strategists are saying: don’t waste a good crisis. Strategists seem to be saying that. “Let’s blame anyone but our government education policy since 2019 for the poor learning outcomes. Let’s do a study which divides students into groups, and let’s blame poor performance outcomes on inclusive policies of former governments which allowed special needs students to be in every school in every classroom.” And so we have K to 3 student achievement tests, Madam Speaker, administered by teachers who are fully able to identify students who are falling behind themselves. They certainly don’t need these achievement tests to do so, but the government is bringing these achievement tests in, these tests to identify students who are falling behind. “For what purpose?” I ask.

I think the answer is pretty clear if you connect the dots and maybe read between the lines a little bit. The UCP government created the made-to-fail approach by starving Alberta classrooms of the resources needed to serve the needs of all students in this province. As a result of that, they now are looking at a situation where they're trying to blame somebody else for their own failures and misgivings. Madam Speaker, I think the true intent, ultimately, in this bill, Bill 6, is something that will end up denying the rights of students with special needs to actually be in school again, to go backwards to a point in time where students with special needs were not in the classroom, in our regular classrooms. What we look at as definitions of ableism or what it actually looks like can be described as segregating students with disabilities into separate schools, segregating adults and children with disabilities in institutions.

Now, the government may deny that's exactly where they're headed, but it certainly seems to me to be where they're going. I know that we have limited time left on tonight's debate, but I wanted to make it abundantly clear that if you do connect the dots, Madam Speaker, there is a clear path to understanding what the

government's motivation is, and it very well may be leading to a situation where students with disabilities are targeted next for denial of their fundamental rights under the Charter. That will be to segregate them once again in schools, apart from the regular school system, and that's my greatest fear with Bill 6. I really hope that I'm wrong, but I do expect that the government will ultimately show their true hand.

With that, Madam Speaker, I think I am now close enough to time to move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday, November 25, 2025.

[The Assembly adjourned at 10:30 p.m.]

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