



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature  
Second Session

# Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, November 25, 2025

Day 15

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta**  
**The 31st Legislature**  
Second Session

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

Al-Guneid, Nagwan, Calgary-Glenmore (NDP)  
Amery, Hon. Mickey K., ECA, KC, Calgary-Cross (UC),  
Deputy Government House Leader  
Arcand-Paul, Brooks, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)  
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA,  
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)  
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)  
Boitchenko, Hon. Andrew, ECA, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)  
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)  
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)  
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)  
Brar, Gurtej Singh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)  
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)  
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)  
Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP),  
Official Opposition Deputy Assistant Whip  
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)  
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)  
de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)  
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)  
Dreeshen, Hon. Devin, ECA, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)  
Dyck, Nolan B., Grande Prairie (UC)  
Eggen, Hon. David, ECA, Edmonton-North West (NDP)  
Ellingson, Court, Calgary-Foothills (NDP)  
Ellis, Hon. Mike, ECA, Calgary-West (UC),  
Deputy Premier  
Elmeligi, Sarah, Banff-Kananaskis (NDP)  
Eremenko, Janet, Calgary-Currie (NDP)  
Fir, Hon. Tanya, ECA, Calgary-Peigan (UC)  
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., ECA, Calgary-Mountain View (NDP),  
Official Opposition Whip  
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)  
Glubish, Hon. Nate, ECA, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)  
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)  
Gray, Hon. Christina, ECA, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),  
Official Opposition House Leader  
Guthrie, Hon. Peter F., ECA, Airdrie-Cochrane (Ind)  
Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)  
Hayter, Julia K.U., Calgary-Edgemont (NDP)  
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, ECA, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)  
Horner, Hon. Nate S., ECA, Drumheller-Stettler (UC)  
Hoyle, Rhiannon, Edmonton-South (NDP)  
Hunter, Hon. Grant R., ECA, Taber-Warner (UC),  
Government Whip  
Ip, Nathan, Edmonton-South West (NDP)  
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),  
Official Opposition Assistant Whip  
Jean, Hon. Brian Michael, ECA, KC, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche  
(UC)  
Johnson, Jennifer, Lacombe-Ponoka (UC)  
Jones, Hon. Matt, ECA, Calgary-South East (UC)  
Kasawski, Kyle, Sherwood Park (NDP)  
Kayande, Samir, Calgary-Elbow (NDP)

LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, ECA, Red Deer-North (UC)  
Loewen, Hon. Todd, ECA, Central Peace-Notley (UC)  
Long, Hon. Martin M., ECA, West Yellowhead (UC)  
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)  
Lunty, Brandon G., Leduc-Beaumont (UC)  
McDougall, Hon. Myles, ECA, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)  
Metz, Luanne, Calgary-Varsity (NDP)  
Miyashiro, Rob, Lethbridge-West (NDP)  
Nally, Hon. Dale, ECA, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)  
Nenshi, Naheed K., Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),  
Leader of the Official Opposition  
Neudorf, Hon. Nathan T., ECA, Lethbridge-East (UC)  
Nicolaidis, Hon. Demetrios, ECA, Calgary-Bow (UC)  
Nixon, Hon. Jason, ECA, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre  
(UC)  
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)  
Petrovic, Chelsae, Livingstone-Macleod (UC)  
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)  
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)  
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, ECA, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP),  
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader  
Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, ECA, Calgary-North West (UC)  
Sawyer, Tara, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC)  
Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, ECA, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)  
Schow, Hon. Joseph R., ECA, Cardston-Siksika (UC),  
Government House Leader  
Schulz, Hon. Rebecca, ECA, Calgary-Shaw (UC)  
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP),  
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader  
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, ECA, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)  
Sigurdson, Hon. R.J., ECA, Highwood (UC)  
Sinclair, Scott, Lesser Slave Lake (Ind)  
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)  
Smith, Hon. Danielle, ECA, Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC),  
Premier  
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)  
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)  
Tejada, Lizette, Calgary-Klein (NDP)  
Turton, Hon. Searle, ECA, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)  
Wiebe, Ron, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)  
Williams, Hon. Dan D.A., ECA, Peace River (UC),  
Deputy Government House Leader  
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., ECA, Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)  
Wright, Justin, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UC)  
Wright, Peggy K., Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)  
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),  
Deputy Government Whip  
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)

**Party standings:**

United Conservative: 47

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 2

**Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly**

Shannon Dean, KC, Clerk  
Trafton Koenig, Law Clerk  
Vani Govindarajan, Parliamentary Counsel  
Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and  
Executive Director of Parliamentary  
Services

Nancy Robert, Clerk of *Journals* and  
Committees  
Aaron Roth, Committee Clerk  
Amanda LeBlanc, Managing Editor of  
*Alberta Hansard*

Terry Langley, Sergeant-at-Arms  
Paul Link, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms  
Gareth Scott, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms  
Lang Bawn, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms

### **Executive Council**

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

### **Parliamentary Secretaries**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chair: Mr. Sabir  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Lunty  
de Jonge  
Eremenko  
Lovely  
Renaud  
Rowswell  
Sawyer  
Schmidt  
van Dijken

### **Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship**

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

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 25, 2025

[The Speaker in the chair]

### Prayers

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

Please be seated.

### Introduction of Visitors

**The Speaker:** Seated in the Speaker's gallery today is former MLA and cabinet minister the hon. Christine Cusanelli. She is the current president of the Alberta Association of Former MLAs and is here today with the Alberta Real Estate Association. I ask that she please rise to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

It is my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you the hon. Naresh Bhardwaj, former associate minister and MLA, seated in my gallery. Joining him are representatives of Alberta's largest Hindu temple, the Bhartiya Cultural Society of Alberta: Mr. Pankaj Dixit, head priest, whose spiritual guidance and community service have inspired many, and Mr. Rajesh Arora, president, whose leadership continues to strengthen Alberta's growing Hindu community. I ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** It looks like we have two school groups today, starting with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

**Ms Goehring:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you 66 grade 6 students from Baturyn elementary school in the beautiful riding of Edmonton-Castle Downs. They are joined today by their teachers and some grown-ups that are here to help them. If you could please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** On behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition, the hon. Opposition House Leader.

**Ms Gray:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona and the leader of His Majesty's Official Opposition, I want to welcome St. Martin Catholic school, 32 members, including teachers and parents, who are here to learn about the Legislature. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Wiebe:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you the members of the Chiropractic Association of Alberta. They join us today to advocate for their profession and highlight the essential role that they play in improving Albertans' health and well-being. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**Member Boparai:** Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Kelly Kaur, acclaimed writer and speaker winning the 2025 South Asian inspiration award for arts and culture and the 2024 top 25 Canadian immigrant award. Her children's book, *Howdy, I Am Singh Hari*, is proudly available at Capital Gifts. She is joined by her daughter. I ask that they rise to receive the warm welcome.

**The Speaker:** Airdrie-East.

**Ms Pitt:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you, I'm recalling my constituent, Matt Carre. He's the founder of the Airdrie Angel program, a program designed to help people in Airdrie and area who are struggling at no fault of their own. To date, he's supported over 146 families and has given out over \$275,000 in cash and other items. Please receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**Mr. Nally:** Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you members of the Alberta Real Estate Association. Buying a home can be one of the most stressful times of one's life, but with a good realtor this can become a seamless, stress-free process. If I can ask members of the association to please rise and receive a warm welcome of the House.

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

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's totally my honour to rise and introduce Jax Drury and Hestia Drury, these two lovely humans I met on the weekend at the rally against Bill 9. I was so inspired by their words and their courage. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

**The Speaker:** Grande Prairie.

**Mr. Dyck:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to introduce to you and through you three great individuals and leaders from my constituency of Grande Prairie: Sean Gillis, Ruben Marin, and Brenton Krol. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**Mr. Ip:** Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you my constituents Raj Pulikapparambil and his wife, Mary Valluvassery Joseph. Raj and his wife are entrepreneurs, owners, and franchisees of FreshCo in Edgemont and are tremendous volunteers and supporters of many community initiatives in Edmonton-South West. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Calgary-East.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you Dr. Anthony Chim, a former ESL learner who has recently earned his doctor of arts degree and has reached an incredible 160 countries around the world along with his son Huy Hoang. I invite them both to stand and receive the House's traditional welcome.

**The Speaker:** Banff-Kananaskis.

**Dr. Elmeligi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you Stephen Legault, one of my favourite constituents. He and Environmental Defence have just released a new report called *New Frontiers*, which serves as a guide to help Alberta modernize its energy industry.

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

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you seven distinguished guests from the Redstone community centre, one of northeast Calgary's most dynamic communities. The association hosts many memorable events, including a Stampede breakfast this year that welcomes thousands of people. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

**Mr. Yaseen:** Mr. Speaker, to you and through you I'm happy to introduce Mr. Sadasiva Reddy Guvvala, a dedicated volunteer with the Telugu Association of Calgary. He was also recognized as best sportsman, 2024, in the Calgary & District Cricket League. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The minister of red tape reduction.

**Mr. Nally:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Cal Bricker. Cal is the president and CEO of Spirits Canada, and he most definitely puts the spirit in spirits. Please rise, Cal, and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

### Members' Statements

#### International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

**Member Tejada:** Today is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. The Canadian Women's Foundation has found that a woman or girl in Canada will be murdered every 48 hours. Alberta has the third-highest rate of femicide in the country. Trans and gender-diverse people are more likely to face violent victimization. Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit folks suffer not only misogyny but also the systemic racism which has enabled violence against them for centuries. FearIsNotLove reports that Alberta's incidence of intimate partner violence is above the national average.

We know that over the last three decades over 2 million Albertans have been served by shelters. In addition to shelter, they provide mental health supports, education around healthy relationships, and so much more. Growing up, my family was grateful and fortunate to have received that support. It was life-changing. My mother, sister, and I were able to forge a new path, heal, and eventually live free from fear and violence. The impact of this work can be felt for generations, and I can attest to that. The staff, volunteers, and dollars that bolster shelters, not-for-profits, and legal aid save lives. Sustainable funding for them is imperative.

If you are in an unsafe situation and would like to know more about how to get help, call or text the family violence info line 310.1818. If you are in immediate danger, please call 911.

As a mother and survivor I'm hopeful that we can create a safer world for our daughters and kin. Recognizing that violence against women exists the world over, I'll share a phrase popular in Latin America. [Remarks in Spanish]. We want each other alive; alive and thriving.

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

1:40

#### Bill 11

**Ms Pitt:** Thank you Mr. speaker. Yesterday Alberta made history. With the tabling of Bill 11, this government took a bold step to transform health care in our province. For too long Albertans have faced unacceptable wait times and a system that can simply not keep up. Time and time again governments try to fix the same issue

the same way by pouring billions of dollars into the health care system, yet unacceptable wait times persist. Yesterday we said: enough is enough. It's time for a new era of health care in this province.

If passed, Bill 11 will introduce a dual-practice model, a proven approach used in some of the best health care systems in the world. Countries like Denmark, the Netherlands, and France all have a privilege that Albertans don't. Private-public health care systems have transformed their citizens' lives for the best. This model gives physicians the flexibility to work in both public hospitals and private clinics. That means more surgeries, faster care, and shorter wait times for everyone. Every time a patient who is able chooses care in a private setting, it frees up a space in the public system for another Albertan. That is how we start to break the endless cycle of delays and frustrations that have defined Canada's health system for decades.

Mr. Speaker, the UCP's public health care guarantee remains ironclad. No Albertan will ever have to pay out of pocket for a family doctor visit or medically necessary treatments. Safeguards will ensure the public system stays strong, including requirements for physicians to maintain surgeries in public hospitals and restrictions if shortages occur.

With these proposed changes, November 24 will be remembered as a day of innovation in our beautiful province. Mr. Speaker, Bill 11 is the health care of tomorrow, and we will always remember that its journey to transform health care for Albertans began . . .

**The Speaker:** It says the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, but . . .

**An Hon. Member:** Arm-wrestle for it.

**The Speaker:** No, no, we won't arm-wrestle.

It'll be the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

### Crime and Public Safety

**Mr. Gurtej Brar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Families threatened, homes burned, bullets fired. Public safety has worsened in Alberta under this UCP government. In the past two years extortions, shootings, and arsons linked to organized crime have skyrocketed. On November 4 in this House, instead of addressing this as a public safety issue, the minister of public safety framed it as a South Asian issue. This language is exclusionary. Words matter, language matters, intent matters, especially when people in positions of power speak. These are our neighbours who live, work, and raise their families in Alberta. They are proud Albertans and proud Canadians. They have worked hard, paid their fair share, and followed their dream. Now they feel unsafe more than ever.

This government must guarantee public safety. People must feel safe at home, at work, and in their communities. The UCP must stop framing it as a South Asian community issue and put more resources so everyone can feel safe. When one Albertan is threatened, all Albertans are threatened. The UCP not only needs to correct its language, it also needs to do its job and restore public safety. Safety should not be labelled as Black, Brown, or White. This is not a South Asian issue. This is an Albertan issue, and this is a Canadian issue. Nothing less is acceptable.

Thank you Mr. Speaker.

### Chiropractic Care

**Mr. Wiebe:** Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to announce that today is the annual Chiropractic Day at the Alberta Legislature. This is a day where the Chiropractic Association of Alberta joins us to advocate

for their profession and highlight the essential role they play in improving Albertans' health and well-being. It is a privilege to have a few of the members with us here today.

I have a personal connection to this profession. I grew up with a grandmother who was a chiropractor. Through her I witnessed first-hand the positive impact that they can have on the lives of Albertans.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, 1 in 5 Albertans will live with chronic pain in their lifetime. Many Albertans will turn to medication to treat chronic issues, and if conditions worsen, it becomes a trip to the emergency room. Integrating chiropractic services can help address pain and mobility issues sooner, reducing the risk of long-term complications.

Mr. Speaker, our government is proud of the partnership that we have with the Chiropractic Association of Alberta to address these challenges. Staff in Primary and Preventative Health Services are working with the group on a pilot project to make chiropractic treatment easier to access as part of your overall health experience.

Preventative care is about catching problems early and fewer trips to the emergency room. We're proud to see that the Chiropractic Association of Alberta has introduced the low back on track pilot program. This initiative gives eligible Albertans with lower back pain issues access to publicly funded chiropractic care with a simple referral. By supporting initiatives like the low back on track program, we can ensure that all Albertans have timely access to effective care. When it comes to the health and wellness of Albertans, we've got your back.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

### Bill 11

**Mr. Haji:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday this government introduced an American-style, two-tier health care model for Alberta, a system where Albertans pay out of pocket for surgeries. This is not a minor adjustment; it is a fundamental shift that will change who gets care first and how much Albertans pay out of pocket. Let's not forget that the Premier campaigned against this very idea, yet today she is legislating it.

American-style health care widens inequity. American-style health care prioritizes those who can afford care over those who need it the most. American-style health care does not deliver better health outcomes. American-style health care does not reduce wait times. This is a two-tier system where those who can afford to pay go to the front of the line while those who need the most help are left waiting in pain.

Over the past 24 hours I have received hundreds of e-mails from constituents worried, angry, and embarrassed that Alberta is the first jurisdiction in Canada to adopt an American-style health care model. One wrote:

My father died 12 years ago. Under universal health care, he got his colonoscopy ten days after his doctor ordered [it]. In a two-tier system, he would have waited longer because he couldn't afford private fast-track care. He would never have met his grandchildren.

Mr. Speaker, two-tier, American-style health care is not the answer to a chronic doctor shortage that is a result of poor health workforce planning. Access to health care should never be dependent on your employer or your credit card. Alberta should not copy American style, that leaves millions uninsured and ranks worse on outcomes.

I ask the Premier to stop dismantling what works. Instead, we must invest in public solutions and train more professionals. Albertans deserve care, not a price tag.

### Support for Persons with Disabilities

**Ms Renaud:** Imagine living every single day knowing that the government that controls your future is actively working to make it harder. That's the reality for disabled Albertans. This government isn't building a better province; they're obsessed with power grabs and vanity projects, taking over pensions, creating a provincial police force, dismantling public health care, weakening education, enriching friends and insiders, and they're busy hiding corruption. While they play politics, disabled Albertans are being crushed.

Here's what that looks like. They're clawing back the Canada disability benefit, a tiny \$200 lifeline to the poorest AISH recipients, because apparently \$1,901 a month is enough to live on. The arrogance is staggering. They're blowing up AISH and replacing it with a dangerous, ableist program that cuts benefits by \$200 and sells a fantasy of jobs that don't exist. They've gutted funding for advocacy groups to shut them up. They're forcing mass reassessments, making severely disabled people pay to prove their own suffering. And now they're cutting rent subsidies for social housing and calling it fairness. If deception had a policy manual, this would be the cover page.

1:50

Disabled Albertans are skipping meals, suffering untreated symptoms, and living with a crushing fear of what's next. Every cut, every change is an explosion in their lives. This government calls it progress; I call it cruelty. But here's the truth. Disabled Albertans are organizing, and they're angry. They're ready to fight back, and so are we. No more taking a tiny violin to a knife fight, Mr. Speaker. The disability community is organizing, and we are ready to take this government down.

### Statement by the Speaker

#### Questions by Parliamentary Secretaries

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, just before Oral Question Period begins, I'd like to follow up on a matter that came up yesterday and refamiliarize all of us with the duties and rights of parliamentary secretaries in the Assembly.

At the outset of this, the 31st Legislature, the former Speaker outlined these rights and responsibilities. Speaker Cooper noted that "parliamentary secretaries are private members and... accordingly, they have [the] rights and duties of private members, not of cabinet [ministers]." Furthermore, he noted it is not appropriate "for a parliamentary secretary to direct questions to the minister with whom the parliamentary secretary is affiliated." Members may find these comments on page 12 of *Hansard* from October 31, 2023.

In addition, former Speaker Kowalski also commented on the role of parliamentary secretaries during Oral Question Period. He stated that "if a parliamentary assistant were to ask questions of the minister with whom he or she works, there might be an expression of discomfort by the chair and undoubtedly from members throughout." Speaker Kowalski's comments can be found on page 13 of *Hansard* from April 16, 2008.

Therefore, I'd ask that parliamentary secretaries refrain from posing questions to the minister with whom they are affiliated in their parliamentary secretary role.

## Oral Question Period

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

### Physician Compensation Model

**Mr. Nenshi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier listed off a bunch of jurisdictions that have some model of hybrid health care, but she didn't provide any evidence that this system actually works. In fact, an international survey from 2017 shows that this kind of scheme raises many, many questions, questions around the risk of dual practitioners skimming more profitable patients from the public sector, inducing additional demand, increasing overall health care costs, and, of course, very serious concerns about equity as public health wait-lists get longer and longer. What consultation was done, and what expert sources did the government consult to make this change?

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

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I mean, we can look at the OECD averages on the cost of health care and where we rank when it comes to output. Unfortunately, in Canada we are one of the most costly systems. We don't have the same number of physicians per capita, the same number of beds per capita, and the same performance per capita. So we're looking at those nations in the world where they perform better and looking at the methods that they're able to achieve that. One of the methods they're able to achieve that is that they allow for a limited amount of private delivery and private payment of service, and we're going to give it a try.

**Mr. Nenshi:** Yesterday the head of the Alberta Medical Association said that this is not innovation but improvisation. Certainly, this government loves to improvise on everything from auto insurance to affordable housing, but you don't improvise when it's people's lives. Last week the Premier used Quebec and New Brunswick as Canadian examples of a dual system, but of course the latest information from the Canadian institute of health innovation shows that Quebec and New Brunswick have far worse waiting times for hip and knee surgeries. What does this Premier think going to a program that delivers worse outcomes for Albertans will actually help Albertans on?

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

**Ms Smith:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're looking at other nations in the world that have a very similar system, and we're making a made-in-Alberta approach. If the member opposite would look at the legislation, he'd see that, number one, we're going to protect the public system first. The doctors who want to practise in both the public and private system have to maintain the service they're providing for us, have to do the same number of surgeries, treat the same number of patients. If they have additional time that is not being paid for from the public system, that's when they'll be able to receive private patients. We're going to make sure that the public system stays strong.

**Mr. Nenshi:** Well, it's clear from that answer, Mr. Speaker, that they haven't actually done the research they need to do on the details. This is no surprise. The UCP's make-it-up-as-you-go-along system has broken the health care system over and over. They're spending more and more money on worse and worse outcomes, and now they want Albertans to trust them with the dismantling of

public health care. Given the DynaLife debacle, given that there are now 11 health care organizations, each with their own CEO, to replace AHS, given Alberta being the world-wide centre of measles outbreaks and a new TB outbreak, how can Albertans trust this Premier when . . .

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

**Ms Smith:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just direct the member opposite to the recent OECD data from 2024. Germany, Netherlands, and Switzerland: universal coverage with competing nonprofit and private insurers and independent providers. It's a mixed system. Surgical wait times are among the world's lowest, typically weeks to a few months for elective surgeries like hip and knee replacements. Patient satisfaction is high. Per capita costs are comparable to Canada. That's a system that's worth learning from, and that's what we're going to be making sure that we emulate.

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

**Mr. Nenshi:** There are certainly some members of my caucus that would be quite thrilled that the Premier is extolling the values of socialist, high-tax systems here.

### Election Recall Petitions

**Mr. Nenshi:** The Premier and her government show unbelievable contempt for people that disagree with them. Fourteen UCP MLAs are now facing recall petitions, and they've lashed out with juvenile attacks against their citizens. No one has received an apology from the minister of agriculture, the Member for Airdrie-East, or any others who are exposing citizens to real harassment. Does the Premier believe people have the right to criticize her government, and if so, will she demand . . .

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

**Ms Smith:** Well, absolutely, Mr. Speaker. Anyone has the right of free speech, but I don't think that they have the right to overthrow our government, which is exactly what the members opposite are trying to do along with their union pals in the Federation of Labour along with Public Interest Alberta, who are busing in busloads of individuals in order to try to take down members on this side of the Chamber. This is an abuse of process. I think we all know it's a similar abuse of process like the longest ballot, which is also meant to undermine confidence in our democracy. I don't think that's how recall was intended, so we're taking a look at if we need to make changes.

**Mr. Nenshi:** I mean, certainly, this Premier knows a lot about busing people in; for example, for her own leadership review.

The worst of all of these was the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction, who, in a letter he must have known was going to be public, named and shared personal electoral data about one of his constituents. This is a potentially illegal use of Elections Alberta data and, according to the Premier's own legislation, comes with a fine of up to \$100,000. Is the Premier at all concerned that her minister may have engaged in illegal activity?

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

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the members opposite know that there's a thing called a poll book and that you are allowed to get information about who voted in the previous election. It's not complete, and in some cases people do a write-in of their name and

they may not appear on the list. I would invite the members opposite to take a look at the rules. An MLA is entitled to get the poll books, is entitled to use them for their own defence. In this case our members are entitled to defend themselves against these kinds of actions, which, once again, is an abuse of process.

**Mr. Nenshi:** The Premier needs to read her own legislation, which clearly says that members are not allowed to use Elections Alberta data for this purpose, yet the minister did.

Since the UCP took power, issues of public disorder have not improved. People feel less safe than ever. Homes and businesses are being shot up. People are living in fear. Yet this government talks about this as a South Asian problem rather than a community safety problem, marginalizing victims.

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

**Mr. Nenshi:** Can the Premier tell us how this government is working to stop extortion linked to organized crime?

**The Speaker:** A point of order was noted at 1:59.

**Ms Smith:** The NDP in British Columbia named the Lawrence Bishnoi gang as a potential terrorist group, and we supported that effort. In fact, I met with the Indian ambassador and consul general this week, and they expressed gratitude at us joining our voice with British Columbia to get that designation. We have members of the community in Edmonton, 100 members in this community, who have been targeted by that gang, who have faced extortion. One person even murdered, Mr. Speaker. I would appreciate if the members opposite would stop their defund-the-police campaigns and stand with us in policing against this kind of terrorist activity.

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

**Mr. Nenshi:** The fearmongering that we just heard from the Premier is precisely the kind of activity that makes people feel less safe in their communities.

**Mr. Schow:** That's a point of order.

## 2:00 Justice System Concerns

**Mr. Nenshi:** All of that said, this Premier and this government have never taken the criminal justice system seriously. They pretend to be a law-and-order government, yet public disorder and crime have increased under their watch, and people are living in fear. Rather than the Premier blame the federal government on international organized crime, can the Premier tell us how she is working to ensure . . .

**The Speaker:** Hon. member. Member, when I rise, you need to stop talking.

**Ms Smith:** Well, in late 2020 there was a certain mayor of Calgary . . .

**The Speaker:** Premier, I'm going to let you start over because you didn't really get started. I didn't say that a point of order was called at 2 o'clock.

Go ahead, please, Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In late 2020 there was a mayor of Calgary who was a proponent of a city council motion to reallocate \$20 million from the Calgary Police Service budget,

which was about a 5 per cent cut from the Calgary Police Service budget. We have been spending year after year after year correcting for the defund-the-police strategies of the members opposite and that member opposite in particular. We have now seen Calgary finally turning the corner. They are at one of the lowest levels of the Crime Severity Index. We are also finally turning the corner, with our recovery-oriented system of care, back to a level of overdoses in most of the province of less than . . .

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

**Mr. Nenshi:** What a bunch of nonsense. The only government that has defunded the police is this government. They recently defunded the police in the big cities by hundreds of millions of dollars through their motions on speed cameras, but it's okay; this government has a long history of interfering in the administration of justice for political ends. The Premier herself was called by the Ethics Commissioner on this, and now we have the heads of the Edmonton Crown prosecution service fired by a government appointee. How can governments believe this government did not interfere in the firing of those Crown . . .

**The Speaker:** Okay. The two members of this House most able to stop talking when I stand up are the leader of the government and the Leader of the Official Opposition, and I will thank both of them to stop talking when I stand up.

The Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member opposite knows, the Crown prosecution service is independent of government. There's a new ADM who is in that position who made different staffing decisions. That is the prerogative of those who are in the public service. The Minister of Justice does not have anything to do with it, nor do I.

**Mr. Nenshi:** Well, I'm glad to hear the Premier finally say that Crown prosecutors should be independent. She's had a lot of trouble understanding that line in the past, as the Ethics Commissioner has said.

The acting assistant deputy minister was named days before they took this action. It was the first action they took immediately after this government supported the Edmonton Police Service in writing a letter also assailing the independence of Crown prosecutors. So how can anyone believe that this government did not in fact interfere? This looks bad, it smells bad, and I want to know about the interference.

**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, this decision on Crown prosecutors is always made by the independent public service. That is exactly what occurred in this case, and there's nothing more to say about it. The member opposite is just incorrect.

## Auditor General's Report on DynaLife Contract

**Ms Pancholi:** Mr. Speaker, the UCP's disastrous decision to privatize lab services to DynaLife didn't just cost Albertans tax dollars; it cost some of them their health. My constituent Lita Bablitz was directly affected. DynaLife misdiagnosed Lita with breast cancer, but she didn't find out it was a misdiagnosis until after she had a partial mastectomy. Thanks to the Auditor General we now know the UCP pushed forward with privatizing lab services against the advice of AHS, who told them it would not save money or improve services. Will the minister of health now apologize to Lita for the pain she endured because of this government's incompetence?

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

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I feel for anyone who had delays during that time period when DynaLife was underperforming. There was no reason to believe that DynaLife, who actually had looked after health care, after those test results in Edmonton and north for over a decade, couldn't in fact be able to provide that service for Calgary and south. Day one, when I became the minister, it was an issue. The Premier and I actually dealt with it and made sure that, in fact, it was turned over to APL.

**Ms Pancholi:** My constituent deserves an apology. On top of the trauma of having an unnecessary surgery that removed part of her breast, every day since then Lita has been dealing with the refusal of anyone to take responsibility. It's a never-ending circle from this government, pointing the finger at someone else. But the UCP can't blame this on DynaLife because they are the ones that contracted DynaLife. They can't blame this on AHS because they are AHS. They can't blame it on Jason Kenney or Tyler Shandro or the federal government or unions or teachers or anyone else. The only ones to blame are the UCP, so when will they grow up, take responsibility, and say they're sorry?

**The Speaker:** I can't remember whether I pointed out that a point of order was called at 2 o'clock or not, but if I didn't do it then, I'm doing it now.

The hon. minister.

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, on day one as the minister of health DynaLife was an issue that was presented to me. We looked into it. We dug into it. We realized that we were going to have to terminate their contract and turn it over to Alberta Precision Labs. Lab services have increased. I feel for the member opposite's constituent. We have a process. I know that individual is going through that process, and there is a way to complain when things do not go well within the health care system.

**Ms Pancholi:** Well, one way to complain is to replace the government. The UCP thinks Albertans have collective amnesia about anything they did before the current Premier came to town, but which party was in charge when lab services were privatized? The UCP. Which party was in charge when Albertans waited weeks for those services and whose lives were affected by that mistake? The UCP. Which party was in charge when \$125 million was wasted on this failed privatization? The UCP. And which party will lose the next election because they have broken the trust of Albertans? The UCP. If the UCP isn't willing to take on the responsibility that goes with governing, they can call an election. The Alberta NDP is one hundred per cent ready. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** We're all really excited about the fact that there are no preambles on the supplementary questions from now on, and the first one to prove they know how to do that is... [interjections] Oops. After the answer.

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP should stand on their record, which was abysmal during their time period in government, with tens of thousands of Albertans leaving the province. Their health care actually deteriorated. We had longer wait times. We had longer wait times for surgeries. We had longer wait times in ER rooms. The members opposite have nothing to say. We've actually improved wait times. We have done more surgeries than pre-pandemic, when they were in office.

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

**Member Gurinder Brar:** Yesterday the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services was asked why any correspondence between him and the Edmonton Police Commission did not show up in two freedom of information requests we filed. He gave a nonanswer. I want to give him another opportunity to answer the same question. What happened with the correspondence between the Deputy Premier as minister of public safety and the Edmonton Police Commission?

**Mr. Ellis:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question. I actually thanked the member yesterday for the question as well. The department has identified an error in the access to information request process. Later this afternoon we'll be tabling the letters from the information requested. This was, quite frankly, human error by the public service employee. On behalf of the deputy minister he certainly apologizes to all members of this Chamber, and he's strengthening processes within the department to ensure checks and balances are in place to ensure something like that does not happen again.

**Member Gurinder Brar:** Given that FOIP results from the minister's office showed no records of correspondence – however, the FOIP results from the Edmonton Police Commission showed five letters signed by this minister – given that the request should have captured these letters and, just as appropriately, did when we asked the Edmonton Police Commission, what does the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services have to say to Albertans who believe this government is hiding information and lacking full transparency as required by the law?

**Mr. Ellis:** Mr. Speaker, I certainly encourage the member opposite to take yes for an answer. I certainly encourage everyone in this Chamber to accept the apology of the deputy minister and the public service sector. All five of those letters are going to be tabled by the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat later on today.

Thank you.

2:10

**Member Gurinder Brar:** Given that if there was a human error, they still have the opportunity to put those documents in front of the public and given that hiding evidence from this House is deeply concerning and raises a red flag about the accountability and transparency from this government and given that Albertans have serious concerns about government overreach into the Police Commission and must have access to ministerial decisions on these files, will the minister explain who is responsible for providing incorrect information to multiple FOIP requests, or should we blame Ottawa for this problem?

**Mr. Ellis:** Mr. Speaker, I certainly encourage all members of this Chamber to listen to the answers that I give. Again, on behalf of the deputy minister he apologizes for the members of the public service sector who did not provide that information. That will be tabled in this House later today, which will be consistent with the letters that were provided by the Edmonton Police Commission.

Again, on behalf of the deputy minister he apologizes.

**The Speaker:** The next set of questions belongs to the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

**Bill 13**

**Mr. Bouchard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans value their fundamental right to free expression, and they expect their government to defend it. We have seen too many examples across Canada and right here in Alberta where professionals have been subject to discipline, lost their licence and their livelihoods for sharing their thoughts and beliefs outside of work hours. To the Minister of Justice: can you explain to this House how the Regulated Professions Neutrality Act will ensure professionals in Alberta are protected from overreach by their regulatory bodies?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Justice and the keeper of the Great Seal.

**Mr. Amery:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is not wrong. Professionals in this province should never fear losing their licence or their livelihoods for their views that they express in their own time. Regulatory bodies should not police personal expression over professional competence and ethics of our professionals. That's what Bill 13 does. It makes it clear that professionals can freely express themselves, they can contribute to the public debate, they can get involved while being treated fairly by their regulatory body. Albertans value the right to free speech.

**Mr. Bouchard:** Given that professional regulators are meant to govern professional competence and ethics, not police beliefs and given that many professionals are concerned that their regulators have increasingly required training that assigns value or blame based on personal beliefs rather than job-related competence, can the same minister explain how Bill 13 will prevent regulatory bodies from mandating ideological training and have regulators operate in a way that they were originally intended to?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Professional regulators should focus on overseeing professional competence and ethics. That's what they're designed to do. That's what they were always designed to do. Through Bill 13 we're making sure that regulators operate in the way that they were originally intended to do. Now, we've heard concerns about these training programs, that they impose ideological frameworks rather than strictly professional standards and ethics. We're changing that through Bill 13, and we're making sure that regulators operate the way that they're supposed to do.

**The Speaker:** The member.

**Mr. Bouchard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his answer. Given that Albertans want assurance that our regulators will act fairly and remain neutral and further given that the right to free expression empowers all Albertans to share ideas, debate, disagree, and to contribute openly to society, can the same minister outline how Bill 13 preserves strong professional standards while ensuring regulators treat all professionals fairly and without bias?

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

**Mr. Amery:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's in Bill 13. It establishes clear principles that operators are supposed to operate fairly and neutrally. These principles prohibit bodies from assigning value or blame to individuals on the basis of their personal beliefs or their political viewpoints. This legislation is not merely symbolic; it'll provide clarity, consistency, and fairness to professionals and regulators. Here in Alberta, in a free province, regulators should regulate professions, not personal beliefs.

**Election Recall Legislation**

**Member Hoyle:** When the Associate Minister of Multiculturalism supported recall legislation, he told this House, "If Albertans feel the MLA in their constituency is not upholding their responsibilities, they can apply to the Chief Electoral Officer to start a petition." Now, just like 13 of his colleagues, the minister has a citizen-led recall petition against him. These recall campaigns are organized by regular Albertans tired of MLAs who have failed at their responsibilities. Does the minister recognize that his constituents demand better?

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

**Mr. Amery:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Recall Act was introduced a number of years ago to deal with particularly egregious conduct. [interjections] It was not intended to . . .

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, outbursts like that are not welcome, not needed, and we should restrain ourselves from that.

Minister, please carry on.

**Mr. Amery:** Mr. Speaker, it was not intended for use by the members opposite along with their friends in the unions and other members to weaponize it and to overthrow governments. That is not the nature of what recall was intended to do. The Premier and this government have committed to looking at it again to see if we can address these issues.

**Member Hoyle:** Given that same minister said that recall legislation "will strengthen Alberta's democratic system and uphold accountability among elected members" and given that the minister said, "This act is ambitious, and it will help strengthen our democracy and accountability here in Alberta," does the minister have regrets about supporting recall legislation now that his constituents want to recall him?

**Mr. Amery:** Mr. Speaker, I can tell you for certain that no member supports the mission of the members opposite or the union bosses in overthrowing a government. Recalls should be reserved for breaches of trust, ethical violations, or dereliction of local duty, not for the opposition members to use it to overthrow a government and create instability in a province. That's not what the nature of recall was ever intended to do, and that's not what we're going to allow.

**Member Hoyle:** Given that the minister is one of 14 UCP MLAs facing recall and given that the Premier mused on her radio show that she'd consult party members, not Albertans, on whether to change the recall legislation, what is the government's plan? To recall their recall? Will we see a Recall the Recall bill this session?

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

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Party members are Albertans, for the member opposite. They belong here. They live here. They have opinions, just like everyone else. I would suggest that that member opposite respect the will of members in this province.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of recall was never intended to be used as a weapon by the NDP. It was not to be used as a shortcut to get around the legitimate general election. They cannot win in a general election, so they're looking at ways to trigger recalls. That was never the intention . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, there's a lot of racket from both sides. Let's hear the questions and the answers, please.

### Government Policies

**Mr. Sabir:** Mr. Speaker, during the election the UCP made a number of promises. The Premier assured Albertans that no one is touching their pensions, but once elected, this Premier immediately started spending public dollars trying to convince Albertans of their risky plan full of nonsensical calculation. Still, Albertans have been clear. They are not buying the UCP's nonsense, and they do not want to leave the CPP. What will it take for the Premier and the UCP to finally listen to Albertans and shelve their risky Alberta pension plan, which no one is asking for?

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the House probably remembers that, you know, we passed the Alberta Pension Protection Act. It laid out a few things quite clearly, that if withdrawing from CPP was ever to be seriously considered by the government of Alberta, it would have to be beneficial to the contributors and to the beneficiaries; all of the withdrawn assets would have to be used for a pension plan; and it would have to be successful in a referendum. I don't think anybody is pulling anything.

**Mr. Sabir:** Given that during the election the Premier also promised she wouldn't push for an Alberta provincial police force, but given Bill 4 is a plan to destroy the RCMP and seize more power and given that the UCP has already tried to interfere in policing by calling the police chief over a traffic ticket and when the Premier asked the Justice minister to help Artur Pawlowski with his criminal charges, does the UCP really think Albertans will give them the go-ahead to take over the police?

2:20

**Mr. Ellis:** Mr. Speaker, I cannot be more clear. We are trying to augment and support police services all throughout this province. It doesn't matter if we're talking about Calgary or Edmonton or Lethbridge or Medicine Hat or up in Grande Prairie or the RCMP. We have challenges in the RCMP when it comes to authorized strength. That is not a problem that is just in Alberta; this is a problem faced all throughout Canada. We're going to continue to make sure that when somebody calls 911, no matter where you are in this province, somebody is going to that call in a timely manner, and we're going to stand by that.

**Mr. Sabir:** Given that during the election the Premier also promised Albertans that she wouldn't push for an American-style, two-tier health care system, but given Bill 11 doubles down on a for-profit, American-style, pay-to-see-a-doctor health care system and given that the UCP made these promises and broke them time and time again, if the Premier wants a mandate to keep breaking her campaign promises, she should dissolve the Legislature and call an election, and we will see who will be sitting where in 28 days. No question.

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

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, what we're promoting is European-style health care, because you know what? They have better health care than we do here in Alberta and here in Canada. In fact, they have shorter wait times for surgeries, they have a quality universal health care system that also embraces a private and nonprofit system, that allows it to actually enhance the

system that they have. I'm not sure why the members opposite don't want Albertans to have that type of health care system.

### Coal Litigation Settlements

**Mr. Guthrie:** Mr. Speaker, coal is a sensitive topic in Alberta. When I was energy minister the government stood firm: no payouts on multibillion-dollar claims from coal companies in the eastern slopes. The law is clear. Companies can sue for incurred costs only, not imaginary profits from product that was never mined. Those resources belong to Albertans, not foreign entities. To the Minister of Justice: why did the UCP overturn the government's previous legal position and cut a cheque for tens of millions in claims that were never owed?

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

**Mr. Jean:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is true. The member is correct that the NDP invited all of these companies from all over the world to come in and mine our coal without thinking about the long-term ramifications. Now, we've come up with a modernized initiative for coal to make sure that we protect our water, our air, people, and animals, and I will say we're doing exactly that. I've received specific instructions from the Premier that nothing is going to sacrifice our water, that we're going to make sure that water continues to be life, and we're going to do just that. Now, it's true that we've had good ministers of energy and bad ones . . .

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

**Mr. Guthrie:** Mr. Speaker, given that while energy minister I was asked by the Premier's executive director, Rob Anderson, to meet with coal lobbyists and given that with court action pending I raised concerns, as any comment could be used against the Crown or myself, and given I insisted department lawyers be present only to be uninvited and given the Premier's office still met with those lobbyists, fuelling speculation of backroom deals, to the minister: how many of those meetings shaped the UCP's enormous payouts to coal companies?

**Mr. Jean:** Mr. Speaker, that former minister couldn't be more wrong. There was a \$14 billion claim against the people of Alberta because the coal file was handled incorrectly by the previous government and by the previous minister. In my mind, there is no question based on the evidence that we have done a great thing for Albertans. We have mitigated the cost that they would have had to deal with if this matter would have gone to court. We have done the best thing for the people long term, and we've protected the environment as well and made things greater in the long term.

**Mr. Guthrie:** Mr. Speaker, given the Premier's office has close personal ties with lobbyists and given the UCP races to drag public servants, municipalities, health care professionals, teachers, and even MLAs into court at the drop of a hat, yet when foreign coal companies come calling, the UCP refuse to fight, to the Premier: why should Albertans trust a government that hides its actions, caters to lobbyists, sues its own people, yet folds instantly to foreign companies looking to raid our treasury?

**Mr. Jean:** I find it a very interesting question, Mr. Speaker, from a member that required, when he went to hockey games, to be served tomahawk steaks and specialty drinks. Now, I don't take invitations from lobbyists to go to hockey games.

**Mr. Guthrie:** Point of order.

**Mr. Jean:** I think that member should stop doing the same thing.

**The Speaker:** A point of order was noted at 2:25 p.m.

The only one we want to hear from right now is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

**Bill 13**  
(continued)

**Member Calahoo Stonehouse:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans know that Indigenous people are overrepresented in our provincial judiciary system. That's why lawyers practising in Alberta are required to take Indigenous cultural competency education called the path. It's training that's well regarded across Canada and has the Canadian Bar Association's endorsement simply because it enriches lawyers' knowledge of Indigenous peoples, the history of colonization, and the impacts from the legacy of the Indian residential schools. So why on earth is the government forcing the Law Society to stop this training?

**Mr. Amery:** Mr. Speaker, Bill 13 does nothing of the sort. It will continue to allow regulators to impose training that is relevant and important to the professionals that they regulate. The fact of the matter is that when a regulator introduces a program that has absolutely nothing to do with the professionals that they regulate, Bill 13 says that that shouldn't be required. But for training that is relevant and important to professional competence or ethics, that will always be available to our regulators.

**Member Calahoo Stonehouse:** Mr. Speaker, given that Bill 13 does exactly this and given that the path course is the Law Society's response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action, particularly number 27, which calls upon lawyers to ensure they receive Indigenous cultural awareness education, given the Law Society says that education cultural competency is an area where mandatory education is critical, will the government be dropping any other commitments to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action now that they no longer support the mandatory Indigenous cultural awareness education?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That is just false. Our government remains firmly committed to working alongside Indigenous communities and people to support the advancing of reconciliation. In fact, we've made progress on 24 of 29 truth and reconciliation calls to action related to this province. Bill 13 does nothing of the sort that the member opposite alleged. It simply restricts mandatory training that is unrelated to competence or ethics. If certain training is relevant, then it will be allowed.

**Member Calahoo Stonehouse:** Given that this is in fact true and maybe this minister should have a lawyer read and interpret the bill and given that 75 per cent of the membership of the Law Society voted to uphold the path as basic training and given the members of the Law Society of Alberta overwhelmingly support the path program, will the minister commit today to respecting the Truth and Reconciliation Commission call to action 27 and the vote by the lawyers and protect this Indigenous training that they require? Will the minister commit that this will stay intact?

**The Speaker:** The hon. . . . [interjections] Maybe I get to say now. The hon. minister.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. The hon. members need to read the bill one more time. Nothing precludes any regulator in this province from imposing training that is related to the professional competence or ethics of the professionals that they serve. If that training is relevant, there are no issues. The members opposite seem to be making an issue out of absolutely nothing. Here's the good news for the member opposite. CPD training for the Law Society of Alberta will remain.

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

2:30                      **Support for Forestry Industry**

**Mr. Dyck:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's forest industry is a cornerstone of our communities, and this industry creates jobs and delivers essential products we use every single day like wood for homes and pulp for paper, for instance, toilet paper. Unfortunately, U.S. tariffs on lumber have gone from 18 to 45 per cent, creating strain on the industry and threatening jobs and competitiveness at a time where stability is something we need. Can the Minister of Forestry and Parks explain to this Assembly what this Conservative government is doing to support our industry here today?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister of forestry and – well, let's just go with forestry.

**Mr. Loewen:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government remains committed to supporting our forest industry. The Premier has been working overtime by leading from the front when it comes to trade, pushing for strong and lasting trade agreements, and creating new markets for Albertan products. Earlier this month I went on a trade mission with our partners in the forestry industry to Japan and South Korea. Our lumber exports to Japan have grown from \$32 million in 2015 to \$43 million in 2024, and we want it to grow even more. I will continue to stand up for the forestry industry and jobs for Albertans.

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

**Mr. Dyck:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that other provincial governments, like the B.C. NDP, believe the solution is piling on more red tape and large cost to companies and further given that bad NDP policy drives mills out of business and harms local economies where people will lose good-paying jobs, to the Minister of Forestry and Parks: what is our Conservative government doing differently to support our lumber industry so Albertans continue to have good, high-paying jobs and create products that build homes and supply us with everyday items?

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

**Mr. Loewen:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government is working hard to protect good, well-paying jobs in the Alberta forestry industry. We're doing that by cutting red tape, streamlining processes, and ensuring harvest plans are reviewed and approved efficiently. I am proud to work alongside Alberta's forestry sector, an industry that partners effectively with government, First Nations, and communities across the province, and one that is deeply committed to responsible environmental stewardship. I will never stop fighting for Alberta's economy, and our forestry industry is an important part of our economy.

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

**Mr. Dyck:** Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Given wildfire risks continue to be one of the greatest threats to Alberta's forests and rural communities and given responsible forest planning and a strong lumber industry play a critical role in reducing fire risk as well as reduces the impact of forest fires, can the Minister of Forestry and Parks explain how this government is leveraging Alberta's lumber industry as part of its wildfire prevention and mitigation strategy to protect communities and strengthen our economy?

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

**Mr. Loewen:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Wildfire can create important habitat, but it is also one of the leading causes when it comes to loss of certain types of habitat. That's why our government has implemented programs to tackle these challenges head on. The community hazardous fuels reduction program is an ambitious and critical program that builds wildfire resiliency by removing hazardous forest fuels in close proximity to communities, and this work is under way. The program focuses on removing high-risk standing timber that could fuel fast-moving fires within five kilometres of vulnerable communities. I want to take this time to thank the forest industry in Alberta and the hard-working Albertans who do those jobs.

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

**Ms Ganley:** No evidence of cost savings, serious concerns about their ability to do the work, and no business case, and yet the minister pushed ahead with the DynaLife debacle anyway, and the Auditor General has some notes. A business case should be a bare-minimum requirement for a competent government. This wasn't an AHS problem. The Auditor General found that the minister insisted on pushing ahead. The results were disastrous and expensive. Why did the UCP push the DynaLife debacle ahead despite the obvious risks and no upsides?

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

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll continue to re-answer that question over and over again. In fact, as soon as I became the minister of health, I was presented with the DynaLife issue. We looked into what the issues were. I also was very concerned that AHS and DynaLife had spent 18 months working out a contract, only to have it fail shortly thereafter. This was a company that had served Edmonton and north really well for over a decade. There was no reason to assume that they couldn't do so in Calgary and the south, but unfortunately they couldn't.

**Ms Ganley:** Given that people with nothing to hide don't tend to destroy documents and given that the minister, not AHS, pushed the DynaLife debacle ahead but critical records related to the decision were, quote, inaccessible, missing, or destroyed and given that the UCP must've spent a pretty penny on lawyers doing a line-by-line on tens of thousands of documents to claim cabinet privilege on dubious grounds, if the minister really thought the evidence would show that AHS was the problem, why did the records mysteriously disappear under the UCP? [interjections]

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister of health and only the minister of health.

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll remind the members opposite that I was not the minister of health at the time.

That being said, although I can't speak to the conduct of Alberta Health Services at the time and what they provided to the Auditor General, I know for a fact that we did co-operate fully with the Auditor General, made sure that they received the products that we typically give to the Auditor General. [interjection] Of course, we are looking at the report that has come from the Auditor General. [interjection] We are making sure that the recommendations are actually acted upon . . .

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

**Member LaGrange:** . . . and taking away procurement from AHS.

**The Speaker:** A point of order is noted at 2:36 p.m.

**Ms Ganley:** Given that anyone living in Calgary at the time remembers the disastrously long wait times that resulted from the UCP's DynaLife debacle and given that over \$125 million was wasted because the UCP put their desired outcome over reason and common sense and given that the report makes it clear that the minister rammed this through, just like they're ramming through American-style health care now, why can't the UCP learn from their mistakes? Is it arrogance or incompetence?

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

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General did identify concerns with DynaLife procurement, which began in December 2020. I became the minister in 2023. Following the transition from DynaLife to APL, patient times have improved approximately 40 per cent, even while patient volumes increased an additional 15 per cent. The overall patient wait times at patient service centres for both appointment-based and walk-in services has decreased overall: 23.1 minutes from January 1 to March 31, 2025.

#### **Physician Compensation Model** (continued)

**Dr. Metz:** The American-style health care plan of the UCP will hurt our ability to train new health care professionals. Training of new health care providers takes time, and the for-profit system lacks both space and time for supervision. This limits force expansion. In chartered surgical facilities current ophthalmology residents cannot even practice surgical skills due to lack of training microscopes. Will one of the many health ministers please tell Albertans how they will mitigate the limit of American-style health care?

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

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I heard just yesterday or the day before from Dr. Justin Rashad Chin, who is an ER doctor right here in Alberta. He sent this letter to the AMA president and also to myself, and he said, "This is emphatically not 'American-style privatization.'" Unlike the U.S. where private insurance dominates and public options are limited, Alberta's reforms seek to preserve universal health care access while offering patients the option of regulated private care for fast, elective procedures. This hybrid model aims to alleviate pressure on the public system, not dismantle it.

**Dr. Metz:** Given that those who can afford to pay for a knee replacement may someday also need cardiac procedures or cancer surgery and given that diverting anaesthesiologists to private American-style clinics from acute-care hospitals has already increased wait times for cancer surgery, given that this doubling

down on private surgical centres is no way to prevent further increases in wait times for critical surgery, will the government be privatizing our hospitals next so people can pay to move ahead on the wait-list?

**Member LaGrange:** Mr. Speaker, the members opposite are delusional if they don't think people are leaving the province every single day to go get surgeries in other provinces and other countries because we are not able to have dual practice here in Alberta. The goal is to align with well-regulated, hybrid approaches used successfully in many high-performing health care centres: Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland; we've got Australia, New Zealand. I could go on and on. These are all high-performing jurisdictions with dual practice. [interjections]

2:40

**The Speaker:** The only one we should really be hearing from now is the Member for Calgary-Varsity. Let's try that.

**Dr. Metz:** Given that those who will need to pay to get or keep a family doctor may also someday need trauma surgery after a collision or need an emergency C-section and given that the lack of health care workforce is already seeing closure of rural hospitals, diversion of ambulances, rurally and within our cities, and given that we already have limited critical services such as obstetric care, especially outside Calgary and Edmonton, why is the government failing to solve these issues rather than expand their American-style

...

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

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're dealing with all of that and making sure we improve the health care system. Dr. Justin Chin also said that [interjections] Alberta must take the next steps to building "a world-class system that delivers timely, high-quality care for everyone. Let's reject fear-based scare tactics and have the honest evidence-based conversation we deserve. I'm proud to support these iterative reforms" and call on our leaders to continue. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, it was real easy to hear the question. Maybe some people didn't like the question; maybe some don't like the answer. But, by golly, our job is to hear the answer.

Minister, would you give the answer that we can hear?

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I go on from his letter, "I'm proud to support these iterative reforms" and call on leaders to continue "working to put patients first." We will always put patients first.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

**Mr. Yao:** Yeah? [interjections]

**The Speaker:** As much as it would pleasure me to cut you off, you're on.

### Emergency Medical Services

**Mr. Yao:** Mr. Speaker, Alberta's EMS budget increased from \$343 million in 2011 to a projected \$709 million in 2025. During this time Alberta's population grew 37 per cent from \$3.65 million to \$5 million. The EMS budget line has exploded far beyond population growth. Albertans have concerns about the financial viability of our province, and that includes ensuring responsible spending. To the minister of hospitals: what factors have driven

such a dramatic increase in the EMS spending since municipalities surrendered control of service delivery?

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

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government recognizes the need to improve response times and ensure first responders have the supports they need. Alberta's rapidly growing, aging, and medically complex population requires more EMS resources to deliver timely care. This is reflected in the 84 per cent increase in EMS events, from 393,000 in 2011-2012 to a projected 725,000 events in '24-25, underscoring the growing pressures on our EMS. As in other areas, we've also seen increases in the cost of maintenance, ambulance equipment, fuel and insurance, and workforce compensation with the collective bargaining agreements.

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

**Mr. Yao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that when EMS was managed locally by municipalities, communities had flexibility to co-ordinate resources and tailor responses to local needs and further given that since centralization, decision-making had become bogged down in the AHS bureaucracy that prioritized urban centres by flexing rural-based EMS to cover the cities, can the same minister explain what measures exist under the current centralized provincial model to ensure that local needs and front-line realities are being properly addressed?

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

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the refocusing of AHS and our broader health care system, we now have an important opportunity to strengthen the delivery of EHS under the new framework and the new emergency health services public health corporation. By modernizing the system [interjection] and response model, we can address resource pressures in urban centres and reduce the need to flex resources from rural Alberta and have the system better reflect community capacity and needs. [interjection] Through the empowerment of paramedics, we are exploring caring for more patients where they are. We're looking at alternative transport options, additional care destinations and models, and strategically locating capital and workforce to serve Albertans better.

**The Speaker:** Those yelling out answers should ask their House leader to get on the list.

**Mr. Yao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that emergency services are best managed locally as effective response requires flexibility and quick adaption and further given that municipalities could arguably provide a more cost-effective service because of the synergies they have available and further given that municipalities know their communities best and have proven experience managing integrated fire and EMS systems, again to the minister of hospitals: would you consider reinstating municipal control over EMS operations so that Albertans can once again rely on timely, community-driven emergency response? [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Members, I heard interesting questions somewhere, which means you might want to hear the answer, but you won't be able to unless we can hear the minister.

Go ahead, please.

**Mr. Jones:** Wise words, Mr. Speaker. Our government will continue to leverage the mixed-service delivery model that we have for EMS in the province. Municipalities know their communities

and play a key role in keeping people safe. Local flexibility and quick responses are critical, and that's exactly what we're working to strengthen through the changes under way in Alberta's EHS system. We are bringing municipally owned contracted EHS partners, integrated fire-based EHS agencies, and independent ground EHS partners together through the Alberta emergency medical services standing committee to ensure the new emergency medical system reflects the communities they serve and best practices.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, in 30 seconds we will continue with the daily Routine.

### Presenting Petitions

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

**Mr. Getson:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here submitted by Mr. Mahmoud "Mike" Chadi regarding shisha bars. So it's:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta [in the northern part of Edmonton] . . . urge the Government to introduce a Bill to amend the Tobacco, Smoking and Vaping Reduction Act to extend a province-wide exemption for shisha lounges that exists for cigar lounges.

### Introduction of Bills

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

#### Bill 8

#### Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 8, the Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2025.

This bill will pave the way for AI data centres to meet their energy needs and further advance the modernization of Alberta's electricity market. With the emergence of innovative yet energy-intensive AI technologies it is critical that we protect the reliability and affordability of the power Albertans depend upon. This bill, if passed, will do just that.

With that, I hereby move first reading of Bill 8, the Utilities Statutes Amendment Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a first time]

#### Bill 12

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

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 12, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2). This being a money bill, Her Honour the Administrator, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

The Financial Statutes Amendment Act makes practical, targeted updates to ensure Alberta's laws remain modern, efficient, and responsive to the needs of Albertans. These amendments strengthen oversight, streamline operations, and enable more flexible and effective program delivery across government. This legislation reflects our commitment to responsible fiscal management and ensuring Alberta's programs, investments, and institutions continue to serve Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I move first reading of Bill 12, Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2).

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a first time]

### 2:50 Tabling Returns and Reports

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

**Member Kayande:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have here 57 letters, the requisite five copies, asking the government to please respect the human rights of all Albertans.

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

**Mr. Wright:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got eight tablings today. First is a tabling with five requisite copies of city of Calgary council minutes from November 2, 2020, where the former mayor turned Leader of the Opposition defunded \$20 million from the Calgary Police Service.

Second is a CBC article with five copies covering the same topic.

Then the next six, Mr. Speaker, are letters relating to the conflict of interest review concerning the Edmonton Police Commission. They are marked as follows: letter 1, correspondence to His Worship Amarjeet Sohi dated January 2; second is correspondence to chair Ben Henderson and executive director Matthew Barker from February 28, 2025; third is from Chair Henderson as well as Executive Director Barker, as well from March 24; and then to Chair Henderson on April 10, Chair Henderson on May 8, as well as Chair Henderson on May 14.

**The Speaker:** Are there any others? The Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much. I have the requisite copies of a letter from Megan Bishop with the Book Publishers Association of Alberta advocating for great job creation being one of the ways to invest in local publishers. I hope all members have an opportunity to read it.

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

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As raised in question period, I would like to table the requisite number of copies of a letter that I received from Dr. Justin Rashad Chin which outlines his strong support for the structural reforms contained within Bill 11, including dual practice.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Mr. Speaker, I have the requisite copies of postcards I received from teachers that live in my riding about all of the very disturbing and not healthy ways the education system is functioning now due to the UCP.

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

**Dr. Elmeligi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a lovely handwritten letter from one of the organizers of Canmore Pride asking the UCP to please familiarize themselves with stories from trans youth.

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

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have an e-mail from an ICU RN at the Peter Lougheed Centre in Calgary. Her name is Kasey Whyte, and she's urging the UCP government to listen to the experiences of health care workers and to protect public health care.

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

**Ms Wright:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite five copies of an article written on August 7 in which the Finance

minister has stated that he would not commit to keeping next year's hike at 7.5 per cent.

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

**Member Calahoo Stonehouse:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a letter from the signatories of treaties 6, 7, and 8. It is a cease and desist to dear Premier Smith, and if not happy living on treaty lands . . .

**The Speaker:** Okay. You don't get to read the letter. You just need to present the subject matter, and you don't get to say names in the House even if it's on the title of the thing you're introducing. You don't get to say the name of the member of the Assembly even if it's included in the title of the tabling you're doing, for future reference.

Okay. Hon. members, we are at points of order. [interjection] Well, someone is excited. The first one was at or about 1:59 p.m., I think, called by the House leader for the government side.

### Point of Order Parliamentary Language

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This was a time that I used to actually be excited about because I get to talk about decorum in the House, but honestly the members opposite and the decorum have really declined since the Leader of the Opposition took over. I rise on this point of order because they have two today on the same member, which is the Leader of the Opposition, but I'll get to the second one in just a moment.

The first one. At the time noted, Mr. Speaker, I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j). The Leader of the Opposition said, with my unofficial records: yet the government talks about this as if it's a South Asian problem. To imply that the Premier or the government prefers certain residents of Alberta over others on racial, regional, or other discriminatory basis is clearly a point of order. It imputes false motives and makes accusations. It also creates disorder, whether it was levied against the government as a whole or against the Premier herself. In this instance I don't think it matters. To suggest that the government as a whole or the Premier herself is racist or discriminatory is completely out of line, and the Leader of the Opposition, though new to this Chamber, is not new to politics and should know that kind of language, that kind of decorum is inappropriate. I believe that it's a point of order.

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

**Ms Gray:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Without benefit of the Blues, my understanding is that the Leader of the Official Opposition talked about the government. This was a question about crime. This was a question about the government thinking that some of these crimes are a South Asian problem. I'm looking at *Hansard*, where the Deputy Premier says, "I can tell you that we've been working very closely with the South Asian community," that they "co-ordinated [meetings] . . . I can tell you that in the South Asian community." It continues on. The conversation has been happening because there have been extortions, because there has been violence, because these things have happened. In question period government ministers have gotten up to talk specifically to and about the South Asian community. I don't think this is a point of order. I think this is a matter of debate, but I do not have the benefit of the Blues, and I look forward to your ruling.

**The Speaker:** Well, I heard the comment clearly, and I guess I can't speak to the mind of the Leader of the Official Opposition, but I've

got to say it sounded like someone being called a racist. Even if the member didn't intend that, I think it's worthy of being withdrawn and apologized for. I don't think that's a parliamentary thing to say in here.

**Ms Gray:** I apologize and withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Point of order 2 was called around 2 p.m. by the Government House Leader.

### Point of Order Imputing Motives

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j). I'll be very brief on this. The Leader of the Opposition, one minute after the previous point of order, said: the fearmongering from the Premier. This is clearly a point of order. It's been ruled out of order countless times in this Chamber. I ask that the member withdraw and apologize and not use that language anymore under 23(h), (i), and (j).

**Ms Gray:** On behalf of the member I apologize and withdraw.

**The Speaker:** While the remarks are regrettable, the apology was exactly how it should be done, and I compliment the Opposition House Leader.

The next point of order called was at or around 2:25 p.m. by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane.

**Mr. Sinclair:** I'll take it on his behalf, Mr. Speaker. Is that all right?

**The Speaker:** Okay. Airdrie-Cochrane, is that what you would like?

**Mr. Guthrie:** Yeah.

**The Speaker:** Okay.

### Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

**Mr. Sinclair:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order where sometime between 2 and 2:25-ish – you said 2:25 – the Minister of Energy and Minerals in his response made references to an online source, the same online source and ridiculous comment that the Premier made last week in this House, which was ruled a point of order. When this minister spoke, he was clearly agitated, rattled, and angry. The Member for Airdrie-Cochrane must have struck a nerve with his question, and if he's resorting to insults in his response or babbling unrecognizably about coal, it's because he knows his government dropped the ball and now Albertans are paying for it. Perhaps this minister was so excited to get some airtime before he runs for leadership again because that's the only card they have left to play.

This conduct falls squarely within 23(h), (i), and (j) for the same reason it was last week, when that weak chirp never landed, and the minister should apologize.

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

**Mr. Williams:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I renew the same request that I made last week before this was sorted. No actual language was quoted again today in the point of order. It was a long answer, and the exact language is important for it to be ruled a point of order. I note that no language was particularly cited, as far as I could see, as well in the ruling, so I would ask that clarity, of course.

I do know that the minister of energy was speaking at the time, and he made reference to what the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane ate and drank, clearly matters of debate. It clearly would not fall into making allegations against another member. It's a matter of debate. It clearly would not, under (i), impute false or unavowed motives unless the member wanted to make an argument to that end. I heard none. Abusive or insulting language: it is not abusive or insulting to debate what someone ate and drank. Of course, I leave this in your capable hands, but the House does require clarity when points of order are made so that we know what language is and isn't unparliamentary, and the context in which it was said needs to be clearly outlined in that reasoning. I would request that we make that really clear here today, but with that, I'll leave it in your hands, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

No. You actually gave your turn to your colleague, but the opposition hasn't actually weighed in yet.

**Mr. Guthrie:** I was just going to provide a little clarity on that point.

**The Speaker:** No.

3:00

**Ms Gray:** Mr. Speaker, I just rise to join in the debate on this point of order. Language like what people are ordering, eating, drinking, especially language around specialty drinks, talking about people drinking alcohol: all of this reads to me like insults, under 23(j), and personal attacks. It's beneath this Chamber. It's been ruled out of order before. I rise because I disagreed so strongly with what the Deputy Government House Leader had to say on this matter, and I wanted to add my comments for your consideration.

**The Speaker:** Okay. Hon. members, I have the Blues. It was said, "when he went to hockey games, to be served tomahawk steaks and specialty drinks." It was very specific to the member, not a generalization.

There are a couple of issues here. The one that's less relevant I'll start with. There's a reference to hockey tickets, which is currently under investigation by the Ethics Commissioner. It's not that that's not relevant; it's that I would say that the issue that's under investigation exactly I don't think was made reference to in the question, but you're getting close to the line.

As recently as November 19 a similar allusion to steaks and drinks was a point of order under the insinuation that an hon. member of this place had too much to drink. That's not something we get to do here, so I'm going to rule that a point of order, as was done on November 19, and ask for an apology and withdrawal.

**Mr. Williams:** On behalf of the member I apologize and withdraw.

**The Speaker:** Point of order 4 at 2:36 p.m.

**Mr. Schow:** For the sake of moving on with government business today, Mr. Speaker, I'll withdraw the point of order.

**The Speaker:** That concludes that point of order.

## Orders of the Day

### Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, I would like to call the committee to order.

## Bill 7

### Water Amendment Act, 2025

**The Deputy Chair:** Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

**Dr. Elmeligi:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah. I'm pretty happy to be in Committee of the Whole for the Water Act. I think that this is an important piece of legislation that the minister has brought forward. You know, the minister's direction in both the mandate letter and just previously has clearly been around making more water available. To be honest, I've always kind of struggled with that concept because we can't make it rain, right? That being said, it is clear that this bill does make more water available. It changes some of the bureaucracy to ease water licensing and the amalgamation of licences. In that way, it does make water available.

But I'm always wondering, Mr. Chair, about the ecological implications of changing the bureaucracy to make more water available when we have drought-stressed watersheds. I also think this concept of making more water available doesn't really address the priority of Albertans. Through the consultation around this bill we see that the priority of Albertans is really around conserving our water. It's about doing more with less water.

The top priorities identified through the engagement process were environmental protection – 277 out of 574 respondents said that – or promoting conservation efficiency and productivity improvements to reduce water use; 258 out of 574 respondents said that. This bill doesn't really address those priorities. In addition, the engagement found strong cross-sector support for establishing and maintaining in-stream flow needs and water conservation objectives for all rivers with water conservation objectives as a key policy tool. Again, this bill doesn't adequately address those priorities of Albertans.

With that, I do have an amendment. Well, I have two, but we'll start with the first one. This first amendment is pretty simple.

**The Deputy Chair:** Thank you.

Members, this amendment will be referred to as amendment A1.

The member can read it into the record. Proceed.

**Dr. Elmeligi:** Okay. Basically, this first amendment strikes out section 2(a) of the bill, which is the part of the bill that amalgamates major river basins, amalgamating the Peace and the Slave River basin with the Athabasca River basin to create the Peace-Athabasca-Slave River basin. I struggle with this idea of merging basins. I think it's problematic because it's a significant shift in water management, and the minister has repeatedly said that this bill will not change the water for life strategy, which is this big, overarching strategy around water management and conservation in the province.

Water for life defines a river basin as an area of land drained by a river and its associated streams or tributaries. Basically, this is the area of land that catches precipitation and drains it into a water body such as a marsh, lake, stream, or river. You can tell by that definition, Mr. Chair, that there's obviously room for discussion around where these basins are because all of our basins eventually empty into the Hudson Bay or the Mississippi or even the Pacific, depending on where you are, so at some point we do have to draw the lines on the map. There are currently seven basins in Alberta, and each has managed to meet various water quality and quantity objectives as defined in the water for life strategy. The problem is that we've drawn these lines on a map and we've created management strategies around them, so to change them by amalgamating two basins together is a significant change not only

to water management in the province but also the water for life strategy.

Water for life uses water basins to accomplish a few different objectives. First, there is a long-term strategy to understand the state of the quality and quantity of all surface water that is supplied in all major basins. There are objectives around defining watershed planning and advisory councils which are based at the watershed basin level. These are multistakeholder councils that work with government in an adaptive management cycle of basin planning and evaluation. These WPACs do what's called state of the basin reports, where they basically analyze all the data and provide recommendations to meet water conservation objectives and other needs in the watershed. The water basins also provide an index based on total loading of a river reach or basin for point source discharges. This is particularly important in the north, Mr. Chair, where we have the highest level of industrial activity, where discharges are a bit of a challenge in some particular areas. Also, water basins are created to understand the state of the quality and quantity of all surface water supply.

So if we're talking about merging basins, we're actually talking about merging all of that information, and that could be problematic because systems and reports and stakeholders already exist that have been looking at it as two river basins. This is the reason why consultation is so critical on this particular idea of merging basins.

The most recent Water for Life: Progress Report that I could find was dated 2008 to 2011. I sure wish there were more progress reports on water for life. That's maybe perhaps a subject for another day. This progress report speaks to updating water-quality programs to support source water protection information and planning. WPACs from across the province incorporated source water protection into their reports and strategic plans. It's a little unclear what happened to this work or where it ended up.

### 3:10

To be honest with you, Mr. Chair, until this bill came out, I've never heard anybody talk about the need to merge these two basins before. Water conservation objectives have been set for the Lesser Slave basin, and in 2018 the Athabasca River basin released a road map for their water conservation objectives. Now, these two basins are being proposed to be combined. Does that mean that these water conservation objectives will be combined? What about in areas where they disagree? Who or which plan will supersede the other? Will a whole new water conservation plan need to be made? That feels redundant given that there are two that already exist.

Water conservation objectives contain a greater degree of social considerations in the determinations than do in-stream objectives or minimum flows. The bill does make reference to minimum flows but in a later section. Water conservation objectives can be established within a water management plan and, approved or not, are outside of a plan and are established legislatively in the Water Act.

We really need to understand how merging these two basins is going to impact water conservation objectives in these two basins because they are different, Mr. Speaker, and changing the boundaries of basins raises all kinds of questions about the implications of these decisions. Again, I need to ask why. Why are we doing this? I haven't heard anybody asking for it to happen. I'm not quite sure why we would be entertaining combining the boundaries of basins, particularly in a part of the province with the greatest industrial activity impacting water quality and quantity. These basin boundaries are our planning areas. It's how we define watershed management planning. You would think in the part of the province where industrial activity is having the most impact on

water quality and quantity that smaller planning areas would be easier to manage than one large one.

By combining these water basins, we inherently weaken the reporting of water management objectives by looking at these objectives across a much larger spatial scale. And, if I'm being honest, Mr. Chair, this part of the act feels like an opportunity to avoid the conversation of interbasin transfers in this part of the province, where an in-depth examination of that is more needed and warranted.

The bill does speak to interbasin transfers, and I'll talk more about that later, but by amalgamating these two basins, we're basically saying that interbasin transfers wouldn't apply in this part of the province. But they really ought to. There are no limits or public oversight mechanisms for interbasin transfers in this new combined basin, and that is hugely concerning. If these basins are combined, interbasin transfers between them will cover nearly half of the province, and that could proceed as a normal licence. That is either a massive oversight or, at the very least, blatant disregard for the public voice in this conversation.

The risk of invasive aquatic species and other risks around chemistry, biophysical components, biology, pH of the water, et cetera: none of that will be included if interbasin transfers happen in this amalgamated basin.

It also risks any changes to cultural perspectives since First Nations were not adequately or meaningfully consulted on this change. First Nations have a sacred relationship with water, and our province has a responsibility to work with them in its management. First Nations were not adequately consulted on this legislation, as my colleague will also speak to, but they are disproportionately affected by water management, especially in the north.

In the two and a half years that I've been in this House, on multiple occasions we have debated and asked questions in question period about pollutants from industrial operations that are downstream disproportionately affecting First Nations communities more than non-Indigenous communities. Whether that's the Kearl spill that we debated quite heavily in the first year, which the AER did just an abysmal fine on, or whether it's just oil sands tailings in general, we know that First Nations communities are disproportionately affected. They should have been disproportionately consulted, conversely, but, like, in a positive way. We know that pollution leads to higher levels of cancer downstream from tailings ponds. We know that water quantity is critical for First Nation drinking water access. It still breaks my heart to think that not every Albertan can turn a tap on and drinking water comes out. We really have First Nations communities that are forward thinking, multigenerational, and we really need to learn from them.

We need to consider that consultation is not an e-mail. The Aboriginal consultation office's protocol for consultation is woefully inadequate not just when it comes to water but pretty much everything. We need to really consider that working with First Nations is not a box-ticking exercise, Mr. Chair. It is an opportunity to make legislation and regulation better. Consulting with First Nations is an important part of truth and reconciliation, and it's integral to braiding knowledge to create a path forward that is more holistic, sustainable, and that really involves all Albertans in the management of our watersheds. We have things to learn from First Nations, and meaningful consultation is an integral part of that.

As I mentioned in my opening comments to this bill, the Mackenzie River basin transboundary water master agreement also applies here. This agreement commits all six governments working on it to work together more closely to manage the water resources of the whole Mackenzie River basin. The agreement makes

provision for neighbouring jurisdictions to negotiate bilateral water agreements, for example Alberta and the Northwest Territories, to address water issues at jurisdictional boundaries on transboundary streams and to provide parameters on the quality, quantity, and flow of water. The parties are committed to

managing the Water Resources in a manner consistent with the maintenance of the Ecological Integrity of the Aquatic Ecosystem . . . "Aquatic Ecosystem" means the interacting components of air, land, water and living organisms including humans, that relate to the Water Resources of the Mackenzie River Basin.

It also speaks to

managing the use of the Water Resources in a sustainable manner for present and future generations . . . the right of each to use or manage the use of the Water Resources within its jurisdiction provided such use does not unreasonably harm the Ecological Integrity of the Aquatic Ecosystem in any other jurisdiction . . . providing for early and effective consultation, notification and sharing of information on developments and activities that might affect the Ecological Integrity of the Aquatic Ecosystem in another jurisdiction; and resolving issues in a cooperative and harmonious manner.

I think that combining these two basins does violate the Mackenzie River master agreement, Mr. Chair, because there are going to be risks to the ecological integrity of the aquatic ecosystem by not having any oversight on potential interbasin transfers. I also think that risk exists to the aquatic ecosystem in that First Nations communities haven't been adequately consulted on this change, and they are a part of the aquatic ecosystem in northern Alberta. I also just am concerned that the resources required to merge all of our existing plans and efforts into one single basin will not increase protection of our watersheds but actually decrease any certainty around protection that we have.

With that, I look forward to hearing comments back from the minister, and I propose that we not merge these two northern basins into one.

**The Deputy Chair:** The Minister of Environment and Protected Areas.

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and to members of this House. I also want to thank the member opposite. I really have enjoyed the debate in this House and the back-and-forth. I appreciate her passion. I appreciate the comments that she made at the beginning of debate on the extensive engagement that went into the development of this bill over the last two years. To address some of the member's concerns and the amendment being put forward – and I will, Mr. Chair, say that I was happy to entertain any amendments that the member opposite brought forward, making sure that they, you know, still carry forward the intention of this bill, which we did engage on over the last two years.

I know the main concern here is for merging the basins. I would say, Mr. Chair, that the approach isn't a departure from principle. It's an application of practical, efficient watershed management. It's rooted in geographical reality and what we see in this area. It continues to support environmental protection, conservation, efficiency, and productivity. We do also require a significant amount of measurement and reporting. That's another piece of this bill that continues to drive transparency, posting all of that information that is available to all water users and all those who might be interested in water use in this area of the province.

3:20

When it comes to basins, they're defined for different reasons. We have 11 WPACs today and seven currently for interbasin transfers. I would say, you know, that these are primarily – we have

three drainage basins in Alberta according to Canada's primary drainage basin definition. So there are different ways to define basins for different purposes. When we're looking at this bill, again, the geography itself justifies the change. The Peace and the Athabasca rivers do not end separately; they converge within our province, forming the Slave River, which flows as a single unified watershed into the Mackenzie River system. To treat those two basins as separate administrative entities within Alberta when they're clearly one hydrological system flowing north is inefficient, and it doesn't make sense for the water use in the region.

We did engage on this, Mr. Chair. Various members of the public, municipal leaders, water users, and others identified this administrative split as a genuine barrier to practical and efficient water sourcing. I think, you know, again, not doing this would be a disincentive to better water use and reuse. Merging these smaller basins together would bring the Peace-Athabasca-Slave basin into alignment, similar to how the South Saskatchewan basin is already recognized as a single administrative unit.

Given the size and scope of the bill I do just want to focus in on some of the comments that the member made and focus on what it does not change. This is enabling legislation, so I think it's important to talk about what it doesn't change. It does not alter existing water allocations in the basin. It doesn't change any established watershed planning work. It doesn't interfere with conservation objectives. It continues to support those conservation objectives, Mr. Chair. Most importantly, it doesn't change any of the foundational work undertaken by the watershed planning and advisory councils.

I know the members opposite do have some concerns around interbasin transfer, but again, you know, I want to point out that while we may be streamlining the process – and that was one of the main things we heard over the last two years. It's something we've talked about before in this House. This is replacing an ineffective, overly bureaucratic system. That said, to be considered low risk, a transfer still has to be limited to adjacent basins and follow strict limits on rates of diversion and not transfer invasive species. I know that those are items that the member opposite just raised in her speech to this amendment moments ago. Any higher risk transfers, including those involving invasive species, would require a special act of the Legislature. That decision would come back to be voted on by members of this House.

Again, final approval for low-risk transfer: this is, I would say, something that still has quite rigorous processes around it. It's not a free-for-all at all, Mr. Chair. There are still high environmental standards and rigour in place to ensure that we are looking at risks to other users, environment, human health, physical sustainability of land and water, our conservation objectives, hydrology and capacity of our waterways, land-use and water management plans. I think that it is important to look at the very high standards that we already have in place that will also impact how these decisions are made.

I know, Mr. Chair, that the member also raised some concerns with transboundary agreements, and we heard that in debate in second reading as well. I have to be unequivocally clear that we will continue to fully honour our transboundary agreements, especially that with the Northwest Territories. We always have. We continue to take that very seriously. This legislation does not in any way impact or undermine those agreements. We will continue to meet every single one of our transboundary obligations.

Furthermore, some suggestions around the Northwest Territories: I do want to point out that we have engaged with them as well. Consistently throughout the last two years we have kept the Northwest Territories updated on the work that's under way. I personally met with my ministerial counterpart a number of times

the day that this legislation was introduced in the House, Mr. Chair. We also reached out to the Northwest Territories government. Again, we very much value that relationship, and we will continue to uphold those agreements.

Again, Mr. Chair, merging the basins is like how we manage the South Saskatchewan basin. This is very consistent with current government policy.

When it comes to engagement, we take this very seriously, and that includes with Indigenous communities. These are enabling act changes. We've appreciated their feedback. We've also appreciated the feedback from municipalities and communities across the province as well as industry users. You know, there is more work to do. Again, this is enabling legislation. There's more work to come and engagement on the regulatory changes that will be made as a result of these changes.

Again, you know, there is a significant amount of oversight on interbasin transfers. Just like we have with other decisions, there will be consultation, engagement, public notification so that we can confirm that there are not impacts to downstream users or the health of our aquatic ecosystems, Mr. Chair.

For those reasons, I do not support this amendment, and I hope that members of this House will vote against this amendment because I do think it changes the intention of the bill.

**The Deputy Chair:** Thank you.

Are there any others wishing to speak to amendment A1? I will recognize the Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

**Ms Al-Guneid:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise and speak to this amendment to Bill 7. I already spoke on the bill, but today I'm speaking in support of this sensible amendment, brought forward by the hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis, to remove section 2(a). Again, it's a section that calls for merging the Peace-Slave River basin with the Athabasca River basin to establish a whole new basin, the Peace-Athabasca-Slave River basin. The member has spoken at length on why this is problematic, and I think she spoke clearly and thoughtfully here.

I would really like to highlight to the Assembly that the government is coming up with a whole new category of water transfer, calling it low-risk interbasin water transfer. The merger and the creation of a whole new category for low-risk interbasin water transfer changes the way Alberta manages water here, Mr. Chair.

Experts have been telling us that any type of interbasin transfer should remain rare due to the risks associated with them and the potential to impact the long-term integrity of river basins. The Member for Banff-Kananaskis explained that at length. So the question becomes: where are the government's studies to show the potential benefits and risks associated with a lower risk water transfer? Again, a whole new category here. Where is the data that backs up the ministry's findings?

You know, section 47(1)(c) outlines the rate of diversions and shares numbers like "0.1 cubic metres per second" for the Milk River or the Beaver River, "1.0 cubic metres per second" for the Hay River basin, "4.0 cubic metres per second" for other major river basins. My question is: where is the data coming from? How did the ministry achieve this conclusion, and why hasn't the minister shared the studies and the analysis that support these numbers? Why is this privileged information?

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

Rural Municipalities of Alberta has expressed concerns that Bill 7 loosens the requirements around approving interbasin transfers to allow for approval by ministerial order in low-risk scenarios. Again,

it's a whole new category that is untested and unknown here. RMA expressed significant concerns with this change during the engagement process and continues to seek clarity on how this process will be used and for what purpose, Mr. Chair.

The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, or CAPP, did ask for reducing costs around water access for the industry. Of course, there is a balance for economic development and water use here. But CAPP has been very clear, Madam Chair, that the idea of interbasin water transfers did not originate from CAPP or the industry. So the question becomes: who's asking for this, Madam Chair, and who's the government implementing this bill for? The minister said many times here that this is an enabling bill, so the question becomes: enabling for whom?

3:30

I do want to remind the Assembly that section 47(3) of this bill, which is the most problematic part of this bill, gives the minister the power, an unchecked authority, to approve these so-called lower risk water mergers from her political office. Not even an order in council. We're talking about a ministerial order by a minister, and no minister, Madam Chair – no minister from any party from anywhere – should ever have this power to direct any type of interbasin transfer from their political office without public notice, without proper consultation, and without the Legislature. This is an absurd amount of unchecked authority and power centralization at the minister's office. Again, I have to emphasize that this bill allows a whole new type of low-risk water mergers through a ministerial order, and we don't even know how reliable this data is that informed this definition. It's privileged information.

Again, of course, we need to keep up with times and update and amend the act. Alberta has been in a 10-year-long drought, and farmers and Albertans in rural and northern Alberta would tell you that they felt it the most. Speak with any farmer and they will explain that to you, Madam Chair. We should be looking into ways to update the Water Act in a way to protect the water and find conservation solutions for us and future generations, absolutely. This amendment today makes sense because it wants to protect these basins and to be careful with this precious resource. Instead, we see a bill here in which the UCP government is choosing to open up one of our most important resources to political mismanagement from a minister's office, which I think is reckless.

The UCP government needs to go back and do more listening to the consultation, especially if RMA is saying this publicly, and there needs to be more listening to Indigenous leaders, who have said that this bill violates treaty rights. The Member for Edmonton-West Henday had legitimate questions yesterday for the minister, and the minister couldn't even name a single Indigenous nation that the government consulted with. Chief Rupert Meneen from Tallcree First Nation is concerned, asking whether this is maliciousness or incompetence. These are big words, Madam Chair. We need to respect treaty rights, and it's obvious that the consultation was flawed with Indigenous nations. It did not reach the impacted communities. Maybe a text was sent or an e-mail. Who knows? The ministry needs to do more listening to rural and northern Albertans and Indigenous nations before doing any of these interbasin water transfers. Most importantly, this pattern of power concentration in political offices by the UCP must stop to respect the integrity of our laws and to provide policy certainty in our province.

Madam Chair, we need a more serious and robust update to the Water Act to conserve water and address the water shortages and the drought we've been experiencing for years now, and I think this amendment brought by the Member for Banff-Kananaskis is sensible. It makes sense and it's thoughtful and intentional in the conversation, so thank you for that. It tries to avert this hasty merger

of the Peace-Slave River basin with the Athabasca River basin to establish a whole new basin. I encourage the members opposite to support this amendment.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I do just want to respond to a few pieces, I would say, or maybe some inaccuracies in the arguments that the member opposite has just made. I would say again that these decisions were based on the extensive engagement that took place over the last two years. It's interesting to hear this member say that there was not enough engagement when the neighbour to the member opposite, the Member for Banff-Kananaskis, started her second reading speech really, I think, giving some credit where credit is due to my department, who worked very hard over the last two years to engage. In fact, we went out for engagement, stepped back, made it even broader to address some of the concerns that we heard, extended the engagement online, in person, across the province, including with First Nations and Métis communities.

I've heard the member say a number of times that this is untested. First of all, Madam Chair, that's ridiculous. We looked at not only data; we looked at the feedback that we got during the last two years of engagement. We also looked at neighbouring provinces. We don't have many interbasin transfers here, but we are also an outlier. Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Manitoba: all allow for this to happen. It's not untested. It's how it works in other provinces across Canada. You know, I don't think that that's helpful. I think that's misinformation that creates uncertainty around the intention of this bill, and I think it's unfortunate given that a lot of the feedback we heard during engagement was: why are people allowed to do this in our neighbouring provinces, but we just can't seem to do it here?

I also just want to point out – I mean, ministerial orders, Madam Chair, are used for a host of routine government decisions. It is a legitimate tool. Of course, there is still a need for analysis and environmental evaluation. We've spoken about that in this House. We rely on our departments to give us good guidance and look at all of the impacts of those decisions before they are made. All of that will still happen. Again, Bill 7 includes enabling requiring consultation; 48(2) is that section, if the members opposite would like to flip to that section of the bill so that they can feel confident in the fact that additional consultation and engagement will happen as those decisions are made.

You know, the day we made the announcement, it was great to have municipal representation. This will help us to do a better job of managing municipal water needs. It will also help us to be able to reuse effluent, of course, safely and reduce freshwater uses in some industrial cases. I think that's a win. I think that that's something that the members opposite would like to see as well.

I do just want to speak to Indigenous engagement for a moment. We, of course, invited all First Nations and Métis settlements to take part in the engagement. We had in-person webinars, we had bilateral meetings, and, of course, we offered capacity funding, as it's very important to ensure that communities can meaningfully engage, covering the costs of travel. We had 22 First Nations provide input during phase 1. I'm happy to list them if the members opposite would like.

We had Alexander First Nation, AWN, Bigstone Cree Nation, Blood Tribe, Cold Lake First Nation, Duncan's First Nation, Ermineskin Cree Nation, Fort McKay First Nation, Fort McMurray 468 First Nation, Heart Lake First Nation, Kapawe'no First Nation, Kehewin Cree Nation, Mikisew Cree First Nation, Montana First Nation, O'Chiese First Nation, Peerless Trout First Nation, Samson

Cree First Nation, Smith's Landing First Nation, Swan River First Nation, Tallcree Tribal Government, Tsuut'ina Nation. We had six Métis settlements provide inputs, and this was during phase 1, Madam Chair: Paddle Prairie Métis settlement, East Prairie Métis settlement, Elizabeth Métis settlement, Fishing Lake Métis settlement, Kikino Métis settlement, Peavine Métis settlement. We had six Métis communities and organizations provide input as well.

I'm not certain if the members opposite would like to – I think they did ask, Madam Chair, for a list. [interjection] I hear some heckling . . .

**An Hon. Member:** No one is asking.

**Ms Schulz:** Okay.

. . . or speaking in questions. I just want to make sure that if they would like to hear the answers to the questions, that I'm happy to provide it today: Athabasca Landing Metis Community Association, Cadotte Lake Metis Nation Association, St. Albert Riverlot Metis Association, the Métis people of the Foothills region, Mountain Metis Community Association, Owl River Metis Community Association, Lac Ste. Anne Metis Community Association. We also had 10 First Nations provide input online or in person – that was this spring – during phase 2: Beaver Lake Cree Nation, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, Fort McKay First Nation, Fort McMurray 468 First Nation, Tallcree tribal, Blood Tribe, Doig River First Nation, Kapawe'no First Nation, Montana First Nation. We also had Five Métis organizations provide input, again for phase 2: East Prairie Métis settlement, Elizabeth Métis settlement, Fishing Lake Métis settlement, Lac Ste. Anne Metis Community Association, and Owl River Metis Community Association. I think that includes it.

3:40

We take this very seriously. Again, given the requirements within the section of the act that I noted, given the process that is required for consultation and public notification that is already included in this bill and the process that my department undertakes before approving and defining these types of changes when it comes to interbasin transfers, I just want to reiterate to the House that this amendment is not necessary.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**Member Arcand-Paul:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, that was one really fun act to follow. I heard a bunch of names that were included in the consultation. Yesterday we heard the minister say that there were 25 First Nations and 13 Métis groups that were consulted. May I remind this Chamber that an e-mail does not satisfy consultation and that adequate consultation, especially on water, may even require accommodation. I am incredibly concerned. I'm thankful that the minister shared all of that information because then we can go back to our records and find exactly what level of consultation was done. An e-mail, might I remind the minister, is not satisfactory.

Madam Chair, in the brief submitted to this House from the Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation – we must be cognizant of what comments are made in that brief. This goes to the heart of this amendment, proposed by my brilliant colleague from Banff-Kananaskis. First, I'd like to thank the expertise of Sturgeon Lake through the leadership of Chief Sheldon Sunshine, who has kept chiefs across this province abreast of the effects of our shared watersheds, that both the federal and provincial government attempt to do changes to without consulting the rights of the rights holders in this territory. Chief Sunshine is an expert in this area. We should

be really thankful for his sharing of this knowledge because it helps this Chamber honour the treaty relationship when it comes to water management in this province but also because he's just a really stand-up individual.

Sturgeon Lake was not consulted, nor were, despite the comments from the minister just moments ago and yesterday, all First Nations that are connected to the collapsing of the Peace, Slave, and Athabasca basins into a single basin. This is concerning because it means to Sturgeon Lake and in my interpretation that watershed transfers within the expanded basin will not require a particular scrutiny. The Sturgeon Lake territory straddles those water basins. Despite the minister's comments, I remind her that an e-mail does not satisfy consultation, especially for water.

This amendment will allow the minister to redraw this section and go back to the drawing board, consult with the affected First Nations and Métis settlements adequately and meaningfully and require that accommodation should it be applicable in those situations, not to pass it through quickly, as this government is doing right now. Madam Chair, I know this minister wants to do a good job. This will give the government the opportunity to correct its errors and go back to the drawing board to address this concern. I just heard the minister speak against this amendment as well by thanking First Nations for their feedback, except they did not take the feedback that they heard with any respect, even the simplest of warnings to consult on ministerial decision-making to transfer between river basins. Instead, they doubled down.

In the FOIP I referenced earlier in the debate on this bill, it was clear. A concern was raised about the emergency use of ministerial transfers, yet this government doubled down on this extraordinary power. This is why this amendment is necessary, Madam Chair. Consult not only with the First Nations and the Métis settlements but also with those crossjurisdictional areas like British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Yukon, and Northwest Territories to address the severe concerns that this amalgamation will create, that the Member for Banff-Kananaskis highlighted in remarks a few moments ago, and that the minister spoke to just a few moments before me.

The minister says that they're not offending the Mackenzie agreement, but just a quick review of it shows that managing the use of the water resources in a sustainable manner for present and future generations must be obliged in that agreement. Further, nothing in that agreement shall be interpreted in a manner inconsistent with the exercise of any existing Aboriginal and treaty rights as recognized and affirmed in section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, which includes rights now existing by way of land claim agreements or which may be acquired under land claim agreements.

Madam Chair, in that brief submitted by Sturgeon Lake, there is a wonderful reference to *natamawasowin* by Janice Makokis, which means to defend for the children. It is our responsibility in this Chamber to work for those yet unborn, to work for those that are going to follow after us to make sure that we leave them an environment and water that is clean and able to be used for the future generations. Madam Chair, the obligation to consult was absolutely an affront to the treaty rights of First Nations in the province and our responsibility to take care of our young ones, those yet to be born.

Sturgeon Lake also urges us to undertake a study on the significant impacts of Bill 7, which will change our water management in this province, and a proper committee to study this and, quote, not the rushed and undemocratic Committee of the Whole process. End quote.

Madam Chair, there is a lot of work that still needs to be done. I appreciate that this has been two years in the making, but if we're hearing from First Nations that it was not enough and that the actual

recommendations that have been made were not incorporated into this draft, I'm sorry to this Chamber and to the First Nations and the Métis settlements that are watching that we did not do enough, the UCP did not do enough. We are putting your statements on record because we know that consultation is required and that water was never ceded or surrendered to any government. That cannot be done. This is a responsibility of this Chamber to make sure that we are safeguarding for the future.

To the minister: when the water is all gone, what are we doing? Where are we going from here? We know that this is such a necessary conversation. We're in multiyear drought in many parts of this province. Let's open up that conversation to include those that are deeply affected by these amendments.

It's for these reasons, Madam Chair, that I support this amendment and urge this Chamber to pass it, the striking of section 2(a), the amalgamation of the two basins without consulting meaningfully. We have to go back to that drawing board. We have to do the consultation thoroughly, beyond just an e-mail, to ensure that nations like Sturgeon Lake are adequately consulted and accommodated. There is no way that an accommodation to include First Nations can be escaped in this bill. We must do the right thing with our treaty partners. Thank you to my wonderful friend from Banff-Kananaskis for putting this amendment forward.

**Ms Schulz:** Madam Chair, I do want to make sure that there's lots of time for discussion, but I do have to correct the record that my department does take the responsibility of consultation and engagement very seriously. Suggestions that it is an e-mail: that's just incorrect. We reach out in multiple ways. In question period yesterday I was very clear that we reach out multiple ways, including e-mail, registered mail. First Nations and Métis communities have been invited to all of the town halls that we had done over the last two years when it comes to water because we do take that very seriously. We did again provide capacity funding so that First Nations can meaningfully participate, which we know is very important, including travel costs to come to meetings in person so that we can have these very important discussions.

Again, I do just want to be clear that all licence applications – this is enabling legislation. When a decision is actually then going to be made on a potential interbasin transfer, there is a process that takes place where there is a licence application. They are public. They are subject to notice and the ability to provide statements of concern. This includes municipalities, Indigenous communities, and others. It allows opportunity to ensure that each decision considers impacts and public sentiment for the specific activity being applied for and ensures that any concerns, especially to users downstream or, of course, any potential concern to a transboundary agreement, are taken into account. You know, in this way the bill does not impact treaty rights, traditional uses, and harvesting. These are act changes. That consultation happens when a specific application is made and we're moving through the decision process.

I do appreciate the concerns and the importance of engagement and consultation that the members have raised, but I do also want to ensure that members of this House know that that is included in the process that would take place when an application for a lower risk interbasin transfer would come forward.

**The Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

**Mr. Dach:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak in support of the proposed amendment to stop the merger of the Peace-Slave River basin with the Athabasca River basin by striking out section 2(a). I ask a question to begin my remarks. When does a river become a canal? That's exactly what we're contemplating here.

Talking about interbasin transfers is serious business, and we've seen in other jurisdictions where rivers have become nothing more than canals or waterways that serve a commercial purpose, and that's their primary use. Whenever a government describes a piece of legislation using the terminology "enabling legislation," it's always a red flag to me, Madam Chair. Enabling what exactly? Enabling canals to be waterways, which serve purposes only for commercial benefit?

3:50

These interbasin transfers have been very, very rare over the past number of years. I think the actual fact is that since 1999 the only interbasin transfers allowed have been authorized by special acts of the Legislature. This is what the government wants to supersede by this enabling legislation, to retain the right or centralize the right to approve authorized interbasin transfers by act of cabinet. Indeed, Madam Chair, this is pretty concerning.

Transferring water between basins hasn't been permitted. A 2005 proposal to move water from the Red Deer River to the North Saskatchewan basin would have required new legislation. The requirement for a special act has been a significant barrier, preventing many relatively straightforward interbasin transfers from proceeding, and that is one of the things we want to make sure stays and remains. We want to make sure that interbasin transfers are considered as serious business. The fact is, Madam Chair, that only six interbasin transfers have occurred since 1999. These interbasin transfers were transfers of potable, treated city water, not raw water.

Past governments, past iterations of conservative governments have been very, very careful about the enablement of raw water transfers between water basins in this province, as rightfully they should, and we should continue that effort, Madam Chair. That's why I support the amendment that's been brought forward to ensure that the interbasin transfers are not permitted between the Peace-Slave River basin and the Athabasca River basin. Any of us who've travelled along these river channels, river basins, realize the value of wild water in this province and in this country and the place it has in our history. To now begin to enable the adoption of interbasin transfers as a matter of regular commercial practice is something that alters the very mindset that we have with respect to how we see and feel about our country, our nation.

The very treaty that causes us to be able to occupy this territory speaks about treaties lasting as long as the rivers flow and the grass grows and the sun shines. It says nothing about as long as the canal's gates remain open. It talks about rivers flowing. Granted, there have been jurisdictions, Madam Chair, where indeed interbasin transfers have become commonplace, but they are fraught with dangers and difficulties. I think of Nevada. I think of Las Vegas. I think of California. Of course, they are now eyeing our water resources because they've depleted their own. That's, in fact, interbasin transfers gone wild.

I think that the amendment is a reasonable one and speaks to the heart of the matter, and that is that our rivers, our wild rivers, are not canals for commercial purposes. They are wild rivers with their own ecology, their own species of fish and other aquatic animals in them, and the risk inherent in interbasin transfers is something that I don't think we've taken seriously enough, notwithstanding the minister's protestations opposite.

I do think that the First Nations have brought forward very, very valid concerns, and even though the minister has said that she believes she's consulted more than adequately, the complaints from First Nations that have been read into the record here by the members on my side of the Legislature clearly prove otherwise.

Indeed, with that, I think, Madam Chair, that I may rest my comments for now and cede my time to others.

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

**Dr. Elmeligi:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I do have another amendment, so let's wrap this one up with just a few more comments, but I just want to clarify a few things here.

There's a difference between engagement and meaningful consultation where the public can see their results and their input reflected in legislation, and on that first day that we debated this bill I did compliment the minister and her staff for doing quite a substantial engagement with stakeholders and the public on this bill, and I stand by that.

However, that being said, Madam Chair, it's difficult to say that that consultation and engagement was meaningful or effective if I'm still getting e-mails from stakeholders and First Nations who are saying that their input is not reflected in this bill. You can talk to people and you can hear them and you can even take notes and you can do all kinds of things to consult with people, but if there is no evidence of how their input is incorporated into the final piece of legislation or policy, that is not consultation. We don't know that. I think part of the problem here is that we're involved in, as the opposition said, a "back and forth" because there's no what-we-heard document from these consultations, so we don't actually know the content of the consultations.

It is concerning for me that after this robust consultation process myself and my colleagues are receiving many e-mails from many different people stating that their concerns are not recognized in the legislation. This is the importance of closing the loop on public consultation and creating publicly available what-we-heard documents. It gives the government an opportunity to say: here is what we heard from stakeholders and the public, here's how we addressed or did not address those concerns, and here are the reasons why we made the decisions that we made. Without having that thorough understanding, we just engage in a back and forth where we're saying that the minister didn't consult enough and the minister is saying that she consulted a lot, and there's no way to solve that without actually looking at the meeting minutes. I encourage the minister to table some of the notes from those meetings or table the results of the public consultation so that we can hear the input that was gathered.

Throughout my debate on this amendment I made reference to some direct quotes and input, but those had to be obtained through a FOIP request that an organization put forward to the government, and there were some redactions in that FOIP request, so we need to make sure that there's a little bit more transparency about what the public said.

The other thing. The minister did say that this amendment changes the intention of the bill. That's my point. Merging these two basins changes the intention of watershed management in the province, and that is not something that we have evidence that people supported in public consultation. It's not something that scientific data supports, so I do want to change the intent of that clause in the bill because I don't think that intention is productive.

For the minister to say that different basins are defined in different ways and we have more or less basins than the nation and all of that: that is true, but to change the definition of these two basins and to merge them together changes the intention of watershed management in northern Alberta. It impacts our interprovincial and interterritorial water allocation agreements, and it changes how Albertans manage these basins. It's a significant change. It's not publicly supported or supported by First Nations, and that is why I did intend to change the intent of that part in the bill.

**The Chair:** Are there others to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A1 as moved by the hon. member for Banff-Kananaskis.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

**The Chair:** We are back on Bill 7 with no amendments before us, I believe. Shall I call the question? Oh, okay. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

4:00

**Mr. Gurtej Brar:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to speak on Bill 7, the Water Amendment Act, 2025. This is the first major update to Alberta's Water Act in more than two decades. Since 1999 the act has shaped how we protect our rivers, our lakes, our wetlands, and the headwaters that supply almost every community in this province. It has helped keep our environment healthy and our economy strong. It has guided how we share a finite and fragile resource.

Water is life. Water is essential. It is a backbone of life and economy in Alberta. Every farm needs it. Every business uses it. Every home relies on clean, dependable water. We all know that pressure on water is real. However, drought has become more common. Our population is growing. Industry needs certainty, and global pressures on freshwater are increasing. Good water policy should help us plan better, conserve more, and protect future generations.

But, Madam Chair, Bill 7 does not meet that standard. It moves us in the wrong direction. The government has said that this bill will free up water for farmers, ranchers, businesses, and communities, but that is not what the legislation actually does. What it does: simply, it centralizes power. It concentrates control over interbasin water transfers into the office of the minister, taking that responsibility away from the Legislature, away from public debate, and away from checks and balances that Albertans expect. For that reason and many others, we on this side of the House cannot support Bill 7.

Madam Chair, water decisions in Alberta have never been taken lightly. For 25 years any transfer of water between the province's major river basins has required a special act of this Assembly, not a memo, not a ministerial order, a full debate, a public vote, and transparency. In those 25 years only seven such transfers have ever been approved. That tells us two things. First, the system has worked. Second, governments of all political stripes recognize that water is too important to move between basins without clear public oversight.

Bill 7 removes this protection. Under this bill the minister alone can approve what the government calls low-risk interbasin transfers. These approvals will not require debate in the Legislature. They will not require public notice. They will not require consultation with Indigenous communities. They will not even require the release of scientific analysis behind the decision. One person in the cabinet office should not be making decisions that could affect the entire watershed. The wording of the bill uses the phrase "in the opinion of the director" again and again, not based on evidence, not based on size, not in accordance with the Indigenous consultation, just in the opinion. That creates room for political pressure, and Alberta's water should not be subjected to political pressure. A special act forces the government to justify a transfer publicly. Bill 7 removes that obligation. It removes the very heart of democratic oversight.

Madam Chair, Bill 7 also merges two major river basins, the Peace-Slave basin and the Athabasca basin, into one large basin called the Peace-Athabasca-Slave basin. This is not a minor detail buried in the fine print. This is the major reorganization of water governance in northern Alberta. This bill does not explain the

scientific basis of the merger. We have not seen the hydrological analysis. We have not seen the ecological modelling. We have not seen the consultation that should be required when you merge two rivers, the most important basin in the province.

Instead, we have heard from oil and gas companies that they want fewer barriers. Some companies say that they operate on both sides of the basin boundaries and are forced to build duplicate water infrastructure. Bill 7 appeared to address that industry concern but without addressing the environmental, hydrological, or treaty implications of changing the boundaries themselves.

This merger also create new opportunities for low-risk transfers between newly created basins and neighbouring basins like the North Saskatchewan, Hay River, Beaver River basin. Again, those decisions should not rest in the hands of one minister, Madam Chair.

Alberta is also bound by the Mackenzie River basin master agreement, signed by the Northwest Territories, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Yukon, and the federal government. In 2015 the agreement with the Northwest Territories requires that we protect the ecological integrity and give proper notice of decisions that may affect shared waters.

Bill 7 puts those commitments at risk. It risks triggering federal involvement. It risks damaging Alberta's credibility as a reliable partner. Alberta's wetlands are among our greatest natural assets. They hold water during wet seasons and release it slowly during dry years. They filter out pollutants. They support wildlife and protect soil. They are essential to pasture health and agriculture. But Alberta is losing wetlands at the rate of .63 per cent a year. Madam Chair, Bill 7 does not strengthen wetland protection. In fact, it leaves major gaps around how water transfers might affect wetlands downstream.

One of the biggest problems in the bill is the lack of any meaningful definition of cumulative impacts. Science tells us that environmental harm is rarely the result of a single, isolated action. Small withdrawals, small transfers, small diversions added together can lead to major consequences. First Nations, environmental groups, and rural municipal leaders have all said the same thing: cumulative effect must be defined and must be enforced, but Bill 7 leaves this vague and unenforceable. That increases the risk of ecological harm, and it increases the risk of legal challenges.

Madam Chair, it is impossible to protect water in Alberta without respecting treaty rights. Water is central to Indigenous life, culture, health, and economic opportunity. First Nations have made it clear that Bill 7 gives far too much power to the minister and undermines their right to consultation and shared decision-making. Jesse Cardinal of the Keepers of the Water said this in 2024. "Indigenous peoples' right to water governance . . . is not just a solution . . . [it is] the only way to ensure sustainability for all future generations." Bill 7 does not reflect the wisdom. It ignores it. It does not guarantee meaningful consultation. It does not protect section 35 rights. It does not uphold the spirit of treaty co-operation. If we pass legislation that violates treaty rights, we will face the court, and we should. The honour of the Crown demands better.

4:10

Bill 7 brings a new measurement requirement for a licensed household. The part may sound positive at the first glance, but the bill does not require the government to publish the data it collects. Without required publication, that new measure does not strengthen transparency. It only strengthens the government's exclusive control over information. The simple truth is this: Albertans deserve to know how much water is being used, where, and for what purpose.

The last clear public analysis of Alberta's water consumption was done in 2007, 18 years ago. Since then, population has grown, industry has grown, and climate pressure has intensified, but our public data has not kept up. If the government is serious about improving water management, it should commit to publishing detailed regular water reports, not hiding them behind a regulatory system that the public cannot access.

Madam Chair, the bill expands the type of water that can be used for industrial activity. This includes treated industrial water such as water from pulp mills, which the minister has suggested could be used for fracking on the other side of the basin boundary. It also expands rainwater and waste water reuse. In principle, reuse is good, but the bill leaves all the definitions and treatment standards in the regulation. That means the rules can be changed quietly without public debate. If the government wants Albertans to trust what we reuse, it needs clear standards written directly into the legislation. Instead, Bill 7 leaves the public guessing.

More than 80 per cent of Alberta's water supply lies in the northern half of the province, but 80 per cent of our demand is in the south. That imbalance has shaped our water policy for decades. In 2023 Alberta allocated 9.7 billion cubic metres of water, yet the actual use of several sectors was far below the allocation limit. Irrigation districts used about 72 per cent of their allocation. The energy industry used only 22 per cent. If the goal is to improve water access, the government should focus on conservation, efficiency, better use of existing allocation, not on sweeping power for the minister.

We must also acknowledge the political context. Premier Smith has publicly committed to doubling oil sands production.

**An Hon. Member:** No names.

**Mr. Gurtej Brar:** I apologize.

That would double water consumption. Oil sands production already requires roughly 17 barrels of water for every barrel of oil. These facts matter; they shaped the pressure behind this bill. Madam Chair, in April 2025 the ministry released a document called *Enhancing Water Availability*. It asked Albertans for ideas on conservation, efficiency, and productivity. Most stakeholders responded that, clearly, the Water Act is strong and should not be weakened. The bill ignores that feedback.

Here is the responsible approach we would like. First, restore the requirement that all interbasin transfers, no matter the size, must be approved by a special act of the Legislature. Second, commit to the true co-management of water with the First Nations in both spirit and practice. Third, strengthen wetland protection and invest in natural-basin solutions that store and release water naturally. Fourth, require scientific analysis, not opinion, to guide decisions. Fifth, publish water data regularly and openly so Albertans can see the state of their own water system. These steps would actually protect water.

Madam Chair, water is not a partisan source. It belongs to every Albertan. It is our shared inheritance and our shared responsibility. It should never be controlled by a single office, a single minister, or a single political party. Water policy must be transparent, it must be science-based, it must respect treaty rights, and it must be accountable to the public. Bill 7 fails on all of these counts. Albertans deserve better. Our children and grandchildren deserve better. For the sake of the rivers that sustain us, for the communities that depend on them, and the responsibility we owe to the future, we on this side of the House will oppose Bill 7.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**Ms Schulz:** Madam Chair, I want to respond again to just a couple of points that the member made and ask a bit of a question which I

thought was somewhat concerning. First of all, again, I just want to point out to all members of this House that in British Columbia a special act of the Legislature is not required for an interbasin transfer. In Saskatchewan a special act of the Legislature is not required for an interbasin transfer. In Manitoba a special act of the Legislature is not required for an interbasin transfer.

What we're talking about here is lower risk interbasin transfers, and I do want to be clear that all interbasin transfers continue to be subject to rigorous review. It requires application, evidence of need, mitigation of impacts, and public notice. Only if a proposed application meets the criteria and Water Act amendments would a recommendation be put forward to the minister for consideration.

The directors in our department, that the member opposite referenced, make decisions like this on the Water Act, on the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act all the time. That is their job to look at the science, to look at the data, to look at the reasons, to look at the risks, and to make good decisions for Albertans today and for Albertans tomorrow. The director would need to advise that all technical, regulatory, and environmental requirements are met. Applications that do not meet those requirements would not move forward. They would be refused. Reviews of applications consider capacity of watersheds, in-stream needs, land-use plans, transboundary requirements, as I've said, and the purpose and use must show efficient water management practices, which is really the goal of what we're working towards.

Madam Chair, for the north and transboundary comments, we have allocated 1.2 per cent of the Peace and Athabasca River flows. We use less than what is allocated. We are committed to our transboundary agreement requirements and maintaining the environmental integrity of watersheds in Alberta and, of course, in downstream jurisdictions as well.

We have worked to post all licences transparently on a public website. Bill 7 actually works to enhance transparency and measurement and is making sure that the public has access to that information about who's using the water, where it's going, and what's not being used.

We would also agree that water stewardship is shared. Bill 7 amendments, especially measurement and reporting, drive transparency to enhance licensing and management decisions. It's a significant change, Madam Chair, to require all licences to measure and report details. This drives investing to improve efficiency and productivity.

Now, what I was a little bit concerned about, Madam Chair, was the suggestion that we should go and look at all of the unused water allocations. This was something that was very public, I would say, through all of our meetings with the rural municipalities, Alberta Municipalities, all of our water engagements. I think what the member was suggesting was that we should just go out and, if irrigators are only using 70 per cent of their water allocation, claw it back and look at that first. That is how members on that side of the House ended up with Bill 6, completely ignoring the ag industry and producers. That's really risky. In fact, that is one of the first pieces of feedback we got, and the thing that we heard most often was not to do massive clawbacks, throwing out the first in time, first in right, the premise of water for life at a time like this where we've been through a couple of years of drought.

**4:20**

We are also making some significant changes to how we manage water. The changes in the Water Act: the feedback we heard loud and clear was not to make those changes, so I'm not certain if that was what the member was getting at. I think, you know, the fact that our major industries are not using their full allocation does suggest what we're seeing in terms of water reuse, water recycling,

which is actually a good thing for the environment. But given the nature of weather and irrigation and crop patterns and growth, this was something that the ag industry was not interested in looking at. That was something that the irrigation districts raised and we took very seriously, so I certainly hope that that's not what the member was suggesting.

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

**Dr. Elmeligi:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I think the one thing the minister and I can agree on on this bill is that FITFIR is not a conversation that we need to have; very complicated. I think one of the things about this bill that I was reminded of is that water management in this province is incredibly complicated, and that's why robust and meaningful consultation is so important here. The reality is that we are operating in a multiyear drought. We have water-stressed basins right now, so while this bill does make more water available, it's not really having the conversation around water conservation. How do we make sure that we keep more water in the river?

Whether allocations are being used to their full extent or not almost doesn't factor into that conversation around water conservation objectives and in-stream flows. We have watersheds that are stressed, so updating the Water Act, to me, means finding a way to incentivize and promote and enhance doing more with less water. We have less water throughout the year.

That being said, I will introduce a second amendment. It seems like everybody wants to talk about interbasin transfers, so I have an amendment in that regard, and I will pass that on there. This is the big one. It's coming to you. It's two pages, so make sure you get both pages.

I won't read the whole thing into the record, Madam Chair. I will just summarize it.

**The Chair:** I suppose that might be my call, hon. member.

**Dr. Elmeligi:** Madam Chair, with your permission, may I summarize the amendment instead of reading it?

**The Chair:** I suppose a summary of this two-page amendment would be appropriate.

Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A2.

You may proceed.

**Dr. Elmeligi:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Basically, the minister just listed off a whole list of considerations that are a part of the conversation around interbasin transfers. This amendment tries to put some of those considerations into legislation so that Albertans can have some confidence and some certainty that there is significant rigour behind interbasin transfers.

As the minister has pointed out, other provinces have interbasin transfers approved not as a special act through the Legislature, and if we are going to do that here in Alberta, I think we need to make sure that those interbasin transfers are adequately defined, that there is transparency, accountability, and monitoring, and this amendment does that.

What this amendment does is that it strikes out section 47(3), which is really that "the Minister may, by order, authorize the Director to issue a licence authorizing a lower-risk transfer." We're concerned about that because it puts a lot of power in the minister's office. This amendment will say that in order for the minister to authorize the director to issue a licence for a low-risk transfer, that has to be determined based on the best available aquatic science and including water licences that are existing, water allocation, rate of in-stream flows and tributary streams and main stem rivers.

It also requires that there has been a consultation process that includes consultation with First Nation and Métis settlements that is adequate and has written responses, a public consultation for at least a period of 30 days, a reasonable opportunity for members of the public to make written submissions, and that there is an opportunity for the public to view how their input has influenced the decision, and that there's also consultation with experts in the field of water science.

It also has a section that is really about, like, post interbasin transfer monitoring requirements to make sure that any interbasin transfer is meeting the conditions of the licence approval, and as soon as it isn't meeting those conditions and it no longer meets the applicable criteria, it needs to be amended to meet those conditions. This amendment provides the certainty for Albertans that these low-risk interbasin transfers will truly be low risk.

Interbasin transfers have been discussed in Alberta for several years. They can happen now, but they require debate in the Legislature, and the reason for that is that the risks are high and difficult to justify. There are invasive species, which is addressed in the current version of the bill, but, as I said before, water chemistry and biological and physical components are not. We need to make sure that even if these interbasin transfers are not debated in the House, that same kind of rigour is maintained.

The original separations of basins in the Water Act and the requirement for a special act of the Legislature is reflective of principles around watershed management and water conservation and the risks that interbasin transfers entail. The rationale for this more onerous process of interbasin transfers hasn't substantively changed since 1999, so it's great to update it, but we still need to make sure that that rigour is maintained. These changes would collectively reduce necessary limits and oversight that currently help protect the ecological integrity of Alberta's watersheds. The amendment provides additional oversight and attempts to bring more data, critical thinking, public feedback into the decisions around interbasin transfers.

We need to more clearly define interbasin transfers. Right now the bill just defines them as volumes, but there are no other requirements around aquatic ecosystems. I wish there was some way that we could put in the bill the need for the proponent to justify why they need an interbasin transfer in the first place because I think that that's an important part of the conversation that is not defined in this legislation.

There's also no cumulative threshold of diversions. It hasn't been created, but it's needed. Whether the legislation speaks to cumulative effects or not, there does need to be this idea that there's a total amount of water that could be subject to interbasin transfer. That should come out of regulations, but it should also be reflected that we're going to do that somewhere in the legislation. It can have significant impacts on the environment and the priority of other users in the water-exporting basins, and these amendments are really focused on streamlining where long-term impacts of transfers can carry significant risk.

The proposed changes are not consistent with the public feedback the government of Alberta received from their water availability engagement, despite their assertions that public consultation informed this bill. FOIP results revealed that when making decisions about water management and availability, the public expects environmental protection to be a top priority for this government. Just over half of the respondents recognize that interbasin transfers could be appropriate or necessary without a special act of the Legislature if used to provide drinking water to communities, but that's not a condition contained in this bill. Most people, 78 per cent, recognize that there are impacts to removing the requirement of the special act, and written responses indicate

continued expectations for careful case-by-case analysis of interbasin transfer applications and transparency of decision-making. The amendment I've proposed addresses that concern.

Opinions of interbasin transfer are highly polarized in Alberta, with almost 30 per cent of respondents opposing any form of exemptions even for drinking water, which is kind of high, and many disagreeing with the range of potential benefits linked to interbasin transfers. I put that there because I really feel like whatever the decisions we make today in this House, there is definitely a need for more robust communication with the public as to why and what guarantees this minister and this government will put in place to make sure that our water is protected for future generations.

**4:30**

The government's engagement also found that respondents across diverse sectors, including nonprofits, municipalities, agriculture, industry, academia, and the public, highlighted the importance of maintaining environmental flows while balancing competing water demands and showed strong cross-sector support for establishing and maintaining in-stream flow needs and water conservation objectives for all rivers with water conservation objectives as a key policy tool. While this should be considered in every aspect of water management, it's incredibly important for interbasin transfers, and that is not in the current wording in the bill right now. We need to make sure that environmental flows are guaranteed.

While some people think that there are times when interbasin transfers are acceptable, we really need to make sure that this legislation has clear guidelines and parameters for who is making the request, why, the amount of the transfer, the time frame, the time period, and any conditions. All of that needs to be publicly available information, and the current drafting of the bill does not guarantee that.

In March this last year the Rural Municipalities association passed a resolution to oppose amendments to the Water Act that would reduce approval requirements for the transfer of water between basins without the thorough consultation with municipalities. That resolution was based on concerns about enabling water transfers that are approved at a bureaucratic level without requiring cabinet approval, and that raises concerns about accountability and transparency in water management decisions.

Municipalities were concerned with water transfers that could have significant environmental and economic impacts, including the depletion of northern water resources and the disruption of natural water cycles. Prioritizing water conservation efforts and resource management in the southern region where the water usage is high needs to happen before considering interbasin transfers.

Now, I recognize that this resolution by the RMA was passed in March and more consultation has been done since then, but those concerns are still not addressed in this bill. That raises this whole issue. Like, consultation can happen, but that doesn't mean that the feedback is incorporated in the bill.

In-stream flow needs describe the quantity, quality, and timing of water flow necessary to preserve and protect the function and processes of healthy, diverse aquatic ecosystems long term while water conservation objectives are the targets set by the government to mark the minimum volume and quality of water that should remain in rivers.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

That is not reflected in this idea around low-risk basin transfers. If they are such low risk, then we need to make sure that there is a commitment in legislation to in-stream flows. There is no current

scientific justification to do this change, and this amendment helps to ensure that scientific data will be part of the decision-making in a more meaningful way. This part of the bill and others seem to benefit a few large industries without due consideration for the protection of the long-term health of our aquatic systems and river basins.

Some people think that if you're looking at interbasin transfers, you're already in trouble, and I have to say that I agree. Water is a finite resource. Water is life, but we do not have unlimited supplies in Alberta. The decisions that we make about water and, in particular, interbasin transfers here are critical for now and for future generations. A proponent should need to prove that an interbasin transfer is required for their operations to proceed at all.

The current bill contains no provision for public review of the interbasin transfers, and the minister did make reference to section 48(2), that says, "before making an order under section 47(3)," which is interbasin transfers, "the Minister may consult with the public in a form and manner satisfactory to the Minister with respect to the proposed order." But what is satisfactory to the minister? That could change month to month, minister to minister, government to government.

This amendment provides more stringent requirements around public review, that it be for 30 days. It lists the stakeholders and that First Nations and Métis settlements should be consulted and that there need to be some things in writing that show that consultation has occurred and what that input received is.

There is no opportunity for the public to appeal any of these low-risk interbasin transfers. We need to make sure, given the risk of these things, that the public is more directly engaged. And there are alternatives for interbasin transfers. The minister and I: every year in budget estimates we talk about groundwater mapping. I know it's hard, but really getting a better understanding of our groundwater supply and connections to surface recharge may be an alternative to interbasin transfers.

Yeah. I think, with that, I'll move this amendment and take my seat. Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** Thank you.

The Minister of Environment and Protected Areas.

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I really do appreciate the member opposite's genuine interest, I would say, not just when it comes to water but this entire file. It does mean that we have some interesting, productive, and sometimes entertaining conversations, whether it be in the House or in estimates.

When it comes to this amendment – and we've looked through each of the pieces – I would suggest that the House should reject the amendments, and I'm going to walk through the rationale. I know, it's sad and a little surprising. Again, I did tell the member opposite that I would look at amendments that she's raised. You know, I know it takes a very thoughtful approach to this work.

First of all, on the piece of section 47(3)(a) when we look at the assessment of impacts, and that does include cumulative impacts, it's already required, as outlined in section 51(4). So this is already established in the act for all applications, not just for lower risk interbasin transfers. Because of that, this proposed change is duplicative. The director would consider any factor necessary to make the decision. Bill 7 also includes section 169(2)(c.1), which allows the minister to make regulations to refine any requirements related to lower risk interbasin transfers. So again, you know, I know we've talked about that a little bit. These requirements are already in place, so that piece is duplicative.

Now, when we're looking at 47(3)(b) – again, that piece is on consultation – the bill includes section 48(2), that does enable us to

consult. We do not specify the details for higher risk interbasin transfers that would require the special act. Part of that is because each application would be unique, Mr. Chair, and we've given, I think, some examples of that in this House. We do know that consultation will have to reflect the actual proposal and the application that would be considered by the department. That's, again, where we look to assess impact to other users, the aquatic environment, and then the scope would reflect the complexity and potential impacts of the proposal.

So because each application is different – and I know I used this example earlier on in a different stage of debate, but, you know, if this interbasin transfer is for a farm that straddles a basin, would that be the same requirements as potentially a higher risk interbasin transfer? Probably not. Like, it is important that we consult and engage, and I do agree with the members opposite on that front, but, again, I think that has to be fit for the purpose of the application that is in front of us. Again, it's not a one-size-fits-all approach. I know we've said that a lot in this Chamber about a variety of different pieces of legislation, but that's a really great example here of why we wouldn't want to have a one-size-fits-all approach, because not every example that we would be using this for would look the same.

Then I would speak to the fact that Bill 7 includes section – oh, I did mention this already, but the same reason applies for the changes to 47(3)(a) as 47(3)(b) and 48(2), which, again, is that we do have section 169(2)(c.1) which does allow us to make regulations to refine any requirements related to these transfers if needed. Instead, I know the member has also talked about kind of a cumulative limit when it comes to transfers. I would just again say that licences are issued with in-stream protections as a condition of the licence. So a licence does not guarantee water; it gives a licensee access to water based on when it's available, and that is also based on our system of priority, which everybody knows, FITFIR, first in time, first in right; in-stream objectives; or other conditions that would be necessary to mitigate or prevent adverse impacts to the environment or other users.

4:40

We also do agree with the member on groundwater mapping, and we've made some investments to the Alberta Geological Survey to advance some of that work. That's a little bit separate from the amendment we're talking about here, but it does take time, and as the member raised it, I thought I would just address it.

For those reasons, I would say that, largely, these amendments already duplicate what is further on in the act. Once again, I would suggest that the House not approve those amendments.

**The Deputy Chair:** Thank you.

The Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

**Member Arcand-Paul:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak in favour of another wonderful amendment that my friend from Banff-Kananaskis has put forward. In particular, I strongly support the portion which obliged this government to conduct any consultation with First Nations and Métis settlements when they undertake any of these lower risk transfers from river basins. But also, certainly, the balance of the amendments are very good given my friend's expertise in this area.

So let's respond to some of what the minister just commented on, section 48 of the current act. The minister gets to set the rules, and you have to either put up or shut up. Clearly, if we are hearing from First Nations, consultation was inadequate. Mr. Chair, this is why I rise in this Chamber to urge this amendment to proceed. First Nations and Métis settlements need this assurance.

My support of this amendment not only comes from my conversations that I've had with chiefs; it also comes as a reminder to this government about the honour of the Crown, which we all in this Chamber have put upon us by the existence of treaty. We know where the minister stands on this government's interpretation of its consultation, and we know where the First Nations and Métis settlements interpret the level of consultation, and in the middle there is verity.

But let's focus on the crux of this amendment and what it purports to do with respect to consultation. Again, let's look at the brief submitted to this Chamber. The minister today listed numerous First Nations and Métis groups that this government suggests it consulted with for amending the Water Act for the first time in 25 years, and she mentioned that 25 First Nations and 13 Métis groups had been consulted. I don't want to re-litigate the thoroughness of consultation because, let me remind the minister, an e-mail or registered mail does not satisfy consultation for something as important and necessary as water. But I digress. This is something that could be determined in the courts.

Let's look again at the brief tabled in this House by the Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation, where they highlight that, quote, the current Water Act is inadequate to discharge the Crown's duties, including to honourably implement the treaty, and Bill 7 makes it worse. End quote.

The government had the opportunity to do the right thing, to adequately and meaningfully consult. This amendment will give it a shot to provide assurance to First Nations and Métis settlements with the protection of our relative *nipiy*, water. Further to my comments to the first amendment that the UCP voted down, I want to quote the following from Sturgeon Lake. "We did not treaty our water. Water was non-negotiable for our ancestors, as it is for us today... Our treaty is a nation-to-nation, international, sacred covenant that provides the legal foundations of this country."

First Nations have indicated their concerns around water use in this province. In Sturgeon Lake's brief the UCP is supporting the development of a nuclear power plant near Peace River, destructive lithium mining around Sturgeon Lake. We also just heard today the Minister of Affordability and Utilities indicate the next area of concern for First Nations, especially Sturgeon Lake, the proposed construction of AI data centres. This is an issue I've brought to this House relating to the O'Leary AI data centre near Sturgeon Lake.

I do hope the minister involved crosscabinet inclusion from the Minister of Indigenous Relations when it came to amending the Water Act, but I really do question whether that office was even brought into these conversations because it astounds me, the absolute injury this government commits on treaty every single time the UCP makes decisions in this House. Why is that? Why are we always sitting in this place listening to lectures from my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford and I along with numerous colleagues on this side of the aisle on how abysmal the UCP's record is with consultation with First Nations? Aren't the UCP getting tired of not understanding that you have obligations? At this point it honestly is looking less like ignorance and more like intentional malice, to paraphrase Chief Meneen. For the fact that we are opening this piece of legislation for the first time in 25 years, the UCP had the opportunity to meaningfully include Indigenous nations in a framework that would honour our responsibility to treaty and with Métis settlements in this province. Why did this government not do this? Well, it has the opportunity to do so now.

This amendment will require the minister to consult any time they have a request for a lower risk transfer of water from one river basin to another. Not only that; it opens it up to the public as well, for whom water is also life. Why would we limit our requirement

to continuously consult with Albertans when that is our job? Moreover, why are we not requiring any decisions about the land or waters or environment that do not require First Nation consultation? Why are we not including our treaty partners at the table to talk about the very thing that we agreed to share on these territories?

If this amendment is struck down and not voted by the UCP, well, we know their answer on how they respect the relationship with First Nations and Métis settlements in this province. I'm telling you, Mr. Chair, from the comments yesterday and even today I am concerned by the continuous affront to treaty that this government continues to do while it pummels its legislation through without regard for our sacred treaties.

I think it's also helpful to turn to the brief from Sturgeon Lake again, where they discuss that they have filed a judicial review over Alberta's complete failure to even notify them of the Water Act licence issued to O'Leary AI data centre and the resulting failure to consult. Alberta says they have to go to the Environmental Appeals Board, where the municipality and Alberta have made the same argument to that board that the board has no jurisdiction to consider consultation issues. Where does this leave treaty to turn to? Where do First Nations turn to? This is what Sturgeon Lake and certainly others are asking.

I would suggest that this amendment be given the opportunity for First Nations and Métis settlements to be consulted as mandatory under legislation when low-risk transfers are conducted by the minister. I do not see why this is political. This is what is required under the law. This is what we will find from protracted litigation that's going to cost not only taxpayers but also First Nations to take away from their programming to be able to do the work of negotiation and making sure that treaty is adhered to. I join the Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation to call on the government to stop serving one segment of Alberta, which is, in their words, industry, and one purpose when it comes to water, which is more consumption from our sacred waters, and start serving all Albertans by helping us protect our water for future generations.

I urge all members in this Assembly to support this amendment because it is a good amendment to address the needs of public consultation to ensure that we have water for future. We have to remember in this place that water is life. It's not just a saying; none of us can exist without water. We have such a deep relationship with it. All of our industry requires a good amount of water, but we have to make sure that we talk with other Albertans to ensure the longevity of that relative of ours, *nipiy*, and remind this Chamber that *nipiy pimatisiwin*, water is life, and we have a deep obligation to protect it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I support this amendment, and I urge all members in this Chamber to do so.

**The Deputy Chair:** Any other members? The Member for Calgary-Currie.

**Member Eremenko:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to be able to stand and briefly speak to the amendment from my colleague from Banff-Kananaskis on Bill 7, the Water Amendment Act, 2025. The focus of this really is about ensuring a few more checks and balances so that over the next number of years with a potentially amended Water Act this minister and subsequent ministers are held to the very highest account on what is truly our most precious resource when it comes to water and the minister is held to account to follow the science and the numerous kind of indicators that are identified in this amendment so that they're not subject to the whims of partisanship or of geopolitics that ultimately might apply pressure on this minister or future ministers to make decisions that

are not, in fact, in the best interest of our environment, of Albertans, and of the industries that rely on the water supply that we have in Alberta.

Just a week ago there was a story in the CBC, actually, that was talking about the Bow River as it's running through Calgary. It's running incredibly low. There's actually an official shortage advisory on the Bow River. When I went down after our time in the Chambers last week, I really did remark on how low it is. The Bow River basin is an area of incredibly intense demand, whether it be from the municipality or from agriculture, both upstream and downstream from Calgary. It's exactly the reason why a piece of legislation that is written today can't be done in a vacuum. It can't happen exclusively under the current conditions. It has to have the mechanisms put in place for future accountability because this is a system that is constantly in flux. The Bow River as it's running through Calgary is exceptionally low; we had low snowfall. Thankfully, the reservoirs are full, but that may not necessarily be the case. No need to be alarmed at this stage, but after subsequent seasons of drought, you know that can be on the horizon.

4:50

All the more reason to approve the amendment to this bill that outlines that the minister must consider these pieces of information, this data when it comes to whether or not they can approve interbasin transfers. I'm not a big fan, frankly, of allowing for the minister to make these overarching decisions without very robust consultation with the public and certainly without bringing it to the Chamber floor for robust debate. Again, this is a system in flux. I think it is incredibly important that over time we have the opportunity to bring this forward to the public and to bring it to this floor for debate.

There are things that are constantly changing when it comes to our water basins and our general kind of ecological system when it comes to water. We have seasons of drought. We have high years; we have low years. Unfortunately, we've had more low years than high lately when it comes to precipitation and water flow. There can be new invasive species. There can be spikes in invasive species. There are geopolitical shifts, where other regions around the world – for example, the United States – know the abundance of riches that we have here in Alberta when it comes to our freshwater supply, and it will be increasingly in demand. Then there is the emergence of new industries like data centres, that are going to place new demands on the system.

If we only have the legislation today, that might feel okay. It might say: "You know what? The minister has this under control. In the opinion of the director, we can go ahead with this particular interbasin transfer." As water becomes a more important political conversation, as it becomes a more important industrial conversation, as we do more to support First Nations in their rights to clean drinking water, that just might not cut it.

I think that when we're writing good legislation, when we're preparing for the legislation that will in fact be in place for many years, long after any of us are in these Chambers, we should be preparing for the future. I think what the future tells us is that there will be significant demands on our water systems. There will be significant demands on the fresh water that I think, frankly, many, many of us, many Albertans, may take for granted. Many people do not, of course, when it comes to turning on the taps and finding that the water is not clean to drink or to bathe our children, for example, or to hunt or to fish in the areas in and around those water basins.

I just want to really double down on these brief comments, thank my colleague from Banff-Kananaskis for her incredible research and work on Bill 7 and on so many other files, and encourage all

the members of the Chamber to support Bill 7 and the amendment to the Water Amendment Act.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** The Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

**Dr. Elmeligi:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks to my colleagues for standing in support of the amendment and to the minister for her response. I'm a little disappointed that the minister doesn't think that this amendment is necessary. I think given the public concern around interbasin transfers, whether they're low risk or high risk or whatever, and the fact that this is a new and significant change to the Water Act to define low-risk interbasin transfers, including more accountability and transparency in how those decisions are made is kind of the least that we could do to address the public concern.

You know, the minister said that a lot of this is addressed in section 54, around the requirements and the different things that are considered, so then I went back to section 54 and I was like: oh, I have even more notes in the margin that aren't included in this amendment. Section 54 does not go all the way, Mr. Chair, to ensuring that these decisions are data and evidence based. It also doesn't go far enough to define public consultation requirements.

Again, the minister has said that this is an enabling piece of legislation, and it is. It enables low-risk interbasin transfers. It doesn't enable public consultation around those. It doesn't enable the application of the best aquatic science around those. This amendment would have provided that certainty, or would provide that certainty – we haven't voted on it yet – for Albertans. I think that that's what Albertans are asking for. I'm a little disappointed that the minister doesn't think that this is required when it's not in there. It's not in any section of the bill. It's what the people want. It's what people are e-mailing about.

You know, this idea of in-stream flows and that sort of thing: in-stream flows and water conservation objectives are not mentioned nearly enough in this act. They need to be the priority of Water Act legislation. The words "may require consultation" mean that the minister may not require consultation also.

I can appreciate the need for us to have a conversation around low-risk interbasin transfers. The minister provided that example of a farm straddling a basin. Sure. Maybe that is a low-risk transfer. But I do think that we need to make sure that any transfer, low risk or high risk, is a thorough conversation. I don't have confidence, in the way this bill is written right now, that it would be a thorough conversation. I think it opens the door for the minister to make a decision behind closed doors, to not necessarily account for that to the Alberta public or to stakeholders or to First Nations and Métis settlements. I think that that's a risk, and it's a risk with our water, which is kind of the most important resource that we have.

Water is life. We say it on this side of the House all the time, Mr. Chair. I just think that if this is the first time in 20 years that we've opened up the Water Act for amendments, we should be more thoughtful about what we're doing. We need to make sure that we are conserving our water for future generations. We need to make sure that the management of our water not only prioritizes industrial success; it needs to prioritize conservation. It needs to prioritize leaving water in the river, and it needs to prioritize efficiency improvements so that people can use less water to do more things. This act doesn't do that.

This amendment is a step towards that. I will just leave it at that, and we can vote on the amendment.

**The Deputy Chair:** Are there any others that wish to make comment on amendment A2? I'm seeing none.

I'll call the question on amendment A2 as proposed by the Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

**The Deputy Chair:** Any others wishing to provide comment or questions?

You're ready for the question.

[The clauses of Bill 7 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Deputy Chair:** Opposed? That is carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

**Mr. Williams:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that the committee rise and report on Bill 7.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

**Mrs. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 7. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

**Hon. Members:** Aye.

**The Acting Speaker:** Any opposed, please say no. That is so ordered.

5:00

## Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

### Bill 9

#### Protecting Alberta's Children Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

[Debate adjourned November 19]

**The Acting Speaker:** The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to have the opportunity to rise in this House and echo the voices of Albertans across this province, the constituents that I'm privileged to represent, parents, medical professionals, and, most of all, to speak here and use my voice on behalf of trans youth and kids across this province whose voices are being silenced in the most cruel way.

I want to provide a quick overview of, basically, two pages of Bill 9 and what it brings in. I'm not going to say the name of the bill as it's proposed, Mr. Speaker, because I think it could not be more wrong. It is not actually about what the bill's title says it's about. What it is about is giving free rein to this government to clearly, without apology, without hesitation, without justification, violate the rights of Albertans. Unfortunately, this isn't even the first time that we have seen this government do this in three weeks. It's taken no time at all for this government to get drunk on the power it has as a majority government to use it to squash the rights of more and more Albertans.

At the end of October they used it to violate the rights, without justification or cause, of 51,000 Alberta teachers, and that woke Albertans up. They asked the question that I think all of us were thinking: if they can so easily violate the Charter rights, the fundamental rights and freedoms, of Alberta teachers, who's next? It took only a few weeks for us to find out exactly who's next, and who's next is not just, but it is absolutely an attack on trans youth and trans people in Alberta, but it is the rights of parents, it is the rights of medical professionals, and it is the rights of girls and women in this province. If you add all those people up, Mr. Speaker, that is actually an attack on the rights of most Albertans in this province. That is the decision that this government has made.

The irony, of course, Mr. Speaker, is many of the members across the way, especially those who were just elected in 2023, came in riding a cavalry about rights. That's all they talked about, how their rights were violated because they were asked to wear masks or to get a vaccine that saved thousands of Albertans' lives. Their rights were violated. We have a Premier who has made the whole hallmark of her political career to be the champion for individual rights. We saw her call the unvaccinated the most discriminated against in this province. She brought in all kinds of legislation in her own Bill of Rights, where she wanted to protect the rights of Albertans to be able to make their own decisions about getting medical procedures.

But here's the thing, Mr. Speaker. Just like Donald Trump down south, this government is drunk on its power. They actually don't have values and principles that underlie the decisions they make. They have political agendas. They have ideologies. They have a small group of their base that they need to satisfy, and to satisfy that group, they will do just about anything. Any principles that this government or this Premier claimed to have had have gone out the window. Now we see very clearly . . .

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

**The Acting Speaker:** A point of order has been called.

#### Point of Order Parliamentary Language

**Mr. Williams:** Mr. Speaker, I understand it's a passionate topic of debate. I understand many Albertans are very engaged in it, and I appreciate the member's very substantive criticism of the government's policy. Nonetheless, when members opposite veer into saying that the Premier herself has no principles, this is unparliamentary language . . .

**Ms Pancholi:** I apologize and withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Williams:** If I may, it's unparliamentary language under 23 (h), (i), and (j), and I say all those three particularly because they are going to continue to incite some disorder in the House. We ask that the member apologize, withdraw, and, furthermore, refrain from the comments in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Ms Pancholi:** Mr. Speaker, I apologize and withdraw.

**The Acting Speaker:** The point of order is considered and the apology is accepted.

The member may continue.

#### Debate Continued

**Ms Pancholi:** This government has demonstrated that they have no morals or values or principles. They are willing to abandon them at the drop of a hat, and that's exactly what this government, the UCP, the cabinet, has done.

[The Speaker in the chair]

They have said repeatedly in introducing this bill that they want to have, quote, the last word on rights in Alberta, but here's the thing, Mr. Speaker. Those elected members on that side, that group of just over 40 individuals, do not get to have the last word on the rights and fundamental freedoms of Albertans. In fact, what they say when they say they want the last word is that they really want to have the only word because they are not even willing to let their legislation be scrutinized, to be considered, to be evaluated, to see whether or not it actually holds up and meets the objectives that they say that it's supposed to do. No, they want to just say: this is what we're going to do, and nobody – no parent, no child, no medical professional, no Albertan – is able to challenge it, no court is able to consider it because we run supreme. Unfortunately for the members opposite, we live in a democracy, and that is exactly what this government has forgotten. They answer to the people of this province.

I want to talk a little bit about the Charter of Rights, which they so casually and carelessly have thrown away. We have to remember that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects inherent human rights. They are the rights to freedom of expression, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, the rights to equality, the rights to life, liberty, and security of the person. Those are fundamental rights that exist, regardless of what government is in power, regardless of what party is making the decisions. Those are rights that we have as Canadians, as Albertans inherent to who we are. That is what we are insisting that that's what the Charter protects.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, as the members across the way will know because many of them protested strongly during COVID when there were restrictions, those rights are actually intended to protect Albertans and Canadians from government. They're actually intended to make sure that no government, regardless of political stripe, has the ability to throw those rights away. We should all be – and I think we all are – incredibly protective of those rights. We have enshrined it not only in the way that we conduct ourselves every day, but we have a court system and all these provisions, and they're intended to protect those rights not just from particular governments but from all governments.

I want to be really clear. If you look back to the origins of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, you will see that, actually, a foundational principle of the Charter is also to protect minorities against majorities because we understand in this country and all liberal and constitutional democracies that it's not always the will of the majority that will be the most fair, that will ensure that those fundamental freedoms that we care about are actually protected. Really, a majority government is really just about numbers. What it means is that if we just had a pure majority rule system, then the majority could choose to enact legislation that is discriminatory, that suppresses political and cultural minorities, that would restrict civil liberties in the name of public opinion or simply ignore minority interests.

We recognize that minorities in our constitutional democracy have special protection because it isn't just about who can get the most votes. Some things, those inherent human rights – the rights to dignity, the rights to equality, the right to life, liberty, and

security of the person – belong to us regardless of whether or not we are one or we are many. It belongs to all of us. The Charter in and of itself acts as a countermajoritarian safeguard. That is why it is there.

You know what? I would argue that almost every single member in this House, in this Chamber, is somewhat reflective of a minority group, whether we're women – although sometimes our population is a little bit more than men, we're sometimes a minority. Whether you're a religious minority – almost every single religion that's represented in this province is actually a minority because the majority of Albertans actually claim to have no religious affiliation. Actually, every single member – all of us have talked about it. Those of us who have faith in this House have talked about the potential discrimination against us in that faith group. Whether you're a person with disability, whether you're a person of an ethnic minority, every single person has some minority rights that need to be protected. There is one category of people who does not, but that's all right. We won't talk about that, but that is the goal, to make sure that everybody's rights are inherently protected.

Here's the thing about the Charter. The Charter also has baked into it what's called section 1. It's the section in the Charter that says: government actually does have the ability to sometimes breach those rights around equality, life, liberty, and security of the person and freedom of religion, but they can only do it in a way that is reasonable and justified. We see that all the time. If you look over decades and decades of Charter litigation, you will see that is the back and forth that happens. It is: can government justify that the law that they're bringing in can breach those rights because it can demonstrate that it has a clear purpose, that what they're doing meets that purpose, that it limits those rights as little as possible? That's built into the Charter. This is not a blanket prohibition that we have even in our Charter that certain rights can never be violated. What it does is it recognizes that government has to balance certain rights.

But here's what happens when a government like the UCP government brings in the notwithstanding clause before any court has even considered the constitutional validity of their legislation or before anybody has even had a chance to challenge it. They're telling on themselves, Mr. Speaker, because they're admitting that they cannot justify their legislation. They're saying that it is not actually reasonable and that it is not demonstrably justified in a democracy. They know that their law will not withstand scrutiny, and they're saying: we want to stop you from challenging anyways.

**5:10**

That is exactly why the UCP has brought in the notwithstanding clause, both with teachers and now with these three pieces of legislation that it has addressed. It's not doing it to protect children or to protect people; they're doing it to protect themselves. If what they were doing was reasonable and justified, a court would find that to be the case. If the court were to say, "You know what? You got some part of it right but some part of it wrong, government; you've got to go back and change your law to make sure that you're protecting the rights or impairing the rights as minimally as possible," that's the conversation that goes back between courts and democratically elected governments. Why? To protect individual rights. But this government doesn't want to do that. This government, where several of their members cried about parental rights – they cried about the rights of the unvaccinated, but when it came time to actually save their own political reputation, they were quick to throw those rights and those values and those principles under the bus.

The most disturbing part, Mr. Speaker, is having to listen to the bizarre back and forth between this government for so many weeks last year where they talked about the importance of parental rights, but here they are telling parents across this province that they know better. That is exactly what they've done. We even had the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland stand up and say that some parents are bad parents, and apparently he knows better than they do. That's precisely what has happened in this legislation. They're saying . . .

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

**Ms Pancholi:** I apologize and withdraw Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Schow:** No, I'm going to get my point of order. I think it's important to make this note to the Chamber that the member – sorry, Mr. Speaker. You're on your feet.

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

#### **Point of Order Imputing Motives**

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j), listening intently as the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud was speaking and attributing false motives and false words into the mouth of the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland. He clearly did not say that some parents are bad parents and that he knows better than parents. I understand that the member is on a roll, as you might call it, to be charitable, but I think that kind of language, amongst other things that the member has said during this week, is unparliamentary. I rise on this one. I appreciate the member has already decided to apologize and withdraw, knowing full well that as soon as the member said it, it was a point of order.

**The Speaker:** The Deputy Opposition House Leader. [interjections]  
Hon. Government House Leader, you got your say. The next person gets their say.

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That was my understanding as well, that you are to decide these points of order and not the Government House Leader. I don't think that it's a point of order. The member was simply referring to an earlier debate in this Legislature where the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland spoke about parenting at length and certainly gave certain opinions. So it's a matter of debate that just happened a few days ago in this House, and I was actually present in this House. It's not a point of order.

**The Speaker:** Well, having heard both sides, I would say that – obviously, I don't have the Blues because it just happened, but I did hear it. I think where the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud talks about what was said by another member in the House is a matter of debate. When the hon. member imagines to know what the member's intent was, that's what 23(h), (i), and (j) was about. Just withdraw and apologize for that, and you can carry on with your debate.

**Ms Pancholi:** As I said before, I apologize and withdraw.

#### **Debate Continued**

**Ms Pancholi:** Mr. Speaker, this government has said that they believe that they should make decisions that parents and youth and medical professionals should make. They're saying – and I just want to back up and talk a little bit. I believe that many members here and many people watching are parents, and they understand

that every single day we make decisions with our children, on behalf of our children, and we make those decisions with input from other people. In the case of a medical need it really shocks me that the government members don't seem to understand how deeply personal these decisions are between a parent and a child and a medical professional.

When we're talking about children who, according to this legislation, have to already have been diagnosed with gender dysmorphia, they already have a condition. They've been working with a medical professional. If you're a parent in any situation, not even in this situation, if you've got a child who's sick or has a need, you're going to be considering very carefully the pros and cons of any decision you make on behalf of your child. That is just common sense that all parents do. Whether it be this or any other medical condition, you're going to be aware that the choices you make may have pros and cons or risks and benefits, but you're going to do what you believe is the best for your child. If your child is of a certain age, you're also going to do it with their input, with their consideration.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I've heard the Premier and many members of this government stand up and talk about how important it is to them that they want to preserve the fertility of these children and that they shouldn't be able to make these decisions because this government is worried about protecting their fertility. I will tell you, putting aside whether or not there's any medical basis for that argument, that it is absolutely shocking that you're telling parents that they have to be more concerned about their child's fertility when some of them are just going to be concerned about their child's life.

They're going to want to make decisions about keeping their child – we know that trans children and youth are more likely to be at risk of self-harm, suicide, serious mental distress. If I'm a parent and my child is sitting there in that condition, I'm going to make a choice that is going to keep them alive and healthy. And you know what? Those are not going to be choices that are made easily. This is the part that I had the hardest part with. These parents are going to be taking those decisions, and they're going to anguish over them, and they're going to consider them carefully. The last thing they need is an elected member, any elected member, or a Premier or a government saying: we know best for your child. Frankly, they simply do not.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to run out of time to talk about an issue that is also deeply important to me, which is that these bills significantly discriminate against girls. I am a mother of a young daughter who loves playing soccer. Next year when she wants to play soccer, she's going to have to prove to this government that she is a girl, and if she doesn't, she's not going to be allowed to play. This is so broadly and widely discriminatory. There's no way it would ever stand up in court. This government has held up one anecdotal story of a high school student who may have been affected by a trans athlete. One. But there are 200,000 girls between the ages of 12 and 18 who are now being affected by this legislation, and it's going to discriminate against them.

Mr. Speaker, it is unjustifiable, it is discriminatory, and it is a government that is drunk on power. They think they know better than Alberta parents. They think they know better than Albertans, and they simply do not.

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

**The Speaker:** A point of order has been raised by the Government House Leader.

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

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j). The words "drunk on power" have been used a number of times in this speech, and I think it's something that is now beginning to rise to the level of creating disorder in this Chamber. That would be akin to calling the government corrupt or calling someone in the government corrupt. The member also said that the government has no principles and no direction. I think that the member is playing very fast and loose with what is acceptable language and decorum in this Chamber. This is not the first time this has happened.

Mr. Speaker, I do believe that "drunk on power" is language that would create disorder in this Chamber. I would ask that you see that it is a point of order and ask the member to apologize and withdraw.

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

**Mr. Sabir:** Mr. Speaker, again, anything that government members don't want to hear about their government doesn't rise to the level of a point of order. "Drunk on power" is just simply an expression when government exceeds its power, its authority to do things.

**Mr. Schow:** It's an expression.

**Mr. Sabir:** Member, if you have already . . .

**The Speaker:** Through the chair.

5:20

**Mr. Sabir:** Exceeds in power. I think that's our opinion, that the things the government is doing is exceeding their powers, and that's why the expression "drunk on power" is used. I guess it's not a matter of debate, but there are facts to back that, what the government is doing. They're exceeding their powers, and we will find expressions, words that exactly reflect what the government is doing.

I think there wasn't anything else that was in this point of order. As such, the member is making comments which are directly relevant to the bill at hand and has not used any unparliamentary language that would rise to the level of a point of order. It's clearly not a point of order.

**The Speaker:** Well, I listen to both sides, and I guess I have some parts of agreement with both sides. I think in the debate, which I was listening to, the hon. member expressed that she had not much time left and decided, it sounded to me, to close with a flurry of insults, which is not an uncommon practice around here. It's not helpful. I don't think it rises to the level of a point of order in this particular case, but substituting substantive debate with a string of insults is not helpful, and I advise against it.

Now we can carry on.

### **Debate Continued**

**The Speaker:** I think there are three seconds left in that speech, but we've got to let it run.

The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod. Please go ahead.

**Mrs. Petrovic:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak in support of Bill 9, Protecting Alberta's Children Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, legislation that requires taking a responsible, evidence-based approach to youth gender care. First, I want to share why this bill is so important to me on a personal level. I'm a mother of a daughter who participates in physically demanding sports, including jiu-jitsu. She is darn good at it. It is a sport that requires

strength, discipline, and resilience. Physical sports like the one my daughter participates in demand clear and comprehensive rules and regulations to ensure not only her safety but also the safety of every athlete involved.

These activities often involve close physical contact, high-intensity movements, and situations where the risk of injury is significant if proper standards are not enforced. By establishing strong guidelines, we create an environment where young girls can focus on developing their skills, building confidence, and enjoying the sport without unnecessary fear or danger. As a parent I worry about her safety and well-being every time she steps onto the mat. These activities are intense, and without clear, fair, and enforceable rules, young women can be placed at unnecessary risk.

Proper regulations are not just about maintaining competitive integrity; they're about protecting athletes from harm, ensuring they can compete on a level playing field, and preserving the value of fairness and respect in sport. This bill matters because it addresses my concerns. It's about safeguarding opportunities for girls like my daughter to thrive in sport without compromising their safety or dignity. When we fail to put these precautions in place, we fail not only individual athletes but the future of women's sports as a whole.

Mr. Speaker, our government has stated repeatedly that this legislation is grounded in data, research, and the evolving standards of care internationally. If we're going to debate this bill, we must include real-world evidence. This is why we need to examine what happened at the Tavistock gender clinic in England and what the independent Cass review uncovered. The failures exposed in England did not come from cruelty or neglect; they came from a system that grew far faster than the evidence, far faster than the safeguards, and faster than any ability to protect vulnerable children. Bill 9 exists so that Alberta does not repeat those same mistakes.

The Tavistock began as a small clinic with only a handful of referrals each year. Clinicians had time to assess a child's whole life: mental health, trauma, family context, development, and social pressures. But over a single decade everything changed. According to the National Health Service, or NHS, referrals to Tavistock rose from about 70 per year in 2009-2010 to nearly 5,000 per year by 2021-2022. That's not growth; that is a systematic explosion. No pediatric mental health service can absorb that kind of surge without losing safety, oversight, and quality. Those numbers alone should give this Assembly pause. The Cass review also examined national primary care records and found that prevalence of gender dysphoria among ages 18 and under increased by over hundred fold between 2019 and 2021. In plain language: a rise of more than 10,000 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, a medical trend increasing 10,000 per cent in just over a decade is not normal. It's not expected. It's not even seen in major epidemics. Even the fastest growing pediatric conditions do not behave this way. Long-term CDC data shows ADHD diagnosis rising by only about 25 per cent over more than a decade. Autism, which accounts for one of the largest and most significant increases in child development, has risen roughly 300 per cent in over 20 years. These are major shifts in pediatrics, and I'm sure every member here knows a child with ADHD or an autism diagnosis. These increases are measured in tens or hundreds of per cent, not thousands. I looked; nothing else in child or adolescent medicine that I could find comes anywhere close to a 10,000 per cent increase in a decade.

The demographic pattern behind the surge was equally alarming. The Cass review found that 73 per cent of Tavistock's recent referrals were birth-registered females, typically in early adolescence. Historically gender clinics serve mostly boys. This reversal is extraordinary, and the scale is staggering. Tavistock's published

referral data showed 32 girls referred in 2009-2010, over 1,250 girls by 2016-2017, and more than 1,700 girls in some later years. That's an increase approaching 5,000 per cent in under a decade. A rise of that magnitude in any subgroup of distressed children, especially adolescent girls, who are already highly vulnerable to anxiety, peer influence, self-harm, and trauma, is not a footnote. This is a red alert.

This was the backdrop for the Cass review: explosive growth, dramatic demographic shifts, a population of children whose distress was escalating much faster than the evidence or clinical system could keep up with. Cass then examined the children themselves. The review found high rates of anxiety, depression, self-harm, and autism spectrum traits. These are not minor details. They are foundational to understanding identity, coping, and vulnerability. Yet the clinic often failed to address or treat these underlying conditions before moving towards medical pathways.

Then there's the evidence, or more accurately the lack of it. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence reviewed the studies behind puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones in minors and concluded that the evidence was very low quality. The Cass review found lack of evidence for both medical and nonmedical interventions and no national long-term outcome data. In every other area of pediatric medicine if a treatment may impair fertility, may affect bone development, may alter sexual function, may impact neurological maturity, and is irreversible or difficult to reverse, then the treatment is never offered without strong evidence, clinical trials, and long-term follow-up. That is the ethical standard for children everywhere, except youth gender medicine. Finally, Cass found that clinicians cannot predict which young people would continue to experience gender distress into adulthood.

When the future cannot be known and when the consequences of being wrong are permanent, the ethical response is not speed; it's caution. Mr. Speaker, the Cass review conclusion is clear. England's model lacked the evidence, lacked the safeguards and oversight needed to protect children. This is why Bill 9 matters. It matters because when evidence is weak and long-term data does not exist, children should not be pushed towards irreversible medical interventions. It matters because when mental health conditions are common and undertreated, the right approach is to assess the whole child, not just one dimension of their distress. And it matters because when clinicians cannot predict persistence, time is not an obstacle. Time is a safeguard.

Mr. Speaker, England learned these lessons only after children were harmed and the system collapsed under its own weight. Alberta has the opportunity and the obligation to learn from their experience without repeating it. We cannot stand idly by and allow preventable harm to reach our children. Bill 9 ensures that we do not.

5:30

Mr. Speaker, I urge every member of this Assembly to recognize the critical responsibility we share in safeguarding the health, safety, and well-being of our children. By voting in favour of this bill, we send a clear message that the safety of our children is a priority and that we will take every necessary step to uphold that principle.

I strongly encourage all members to support Bill 9 and stand united for our youth. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak in opposition to Bill 9. I do want to begin my remarks by saying, through you, that I take the closing statement by the member

opposite with – I believe it. I believe that the member opposite thinks that this is about protecting some children, but I will be very clear in my remarks that I believe that this is about finding ways to bring in something similar to an executive order that is not respectful of the courts or of human rights to attack a vulnerable group.

I think, at the end of the day, I like to believe that all Albertans care about the safety and well-being of children. I know that those have been the conversations that I've had with people. Often when I talk to people about giving kids a chance to grow up, I would say that the medical treatments that this government has impeded, most frequently from conversations I've had with medical experts around the specific impacts of this legislation, are giving kids the opportunity to wait to experience puberty until they are ready to experience puberty.

I think what I'll do, actually, at this point is stop and tell a story about when I was the minister of health and I was asked to make decisions about something that I didn't have the expertise, the medical expertise, to make a decision about. When the then Premier, the hon. Rachel Notley, told me that I would be her health minister, that's how the conversation felt, Mr. Speaker. I thanked her very much for the confidence that she had in me but asked why she thought I'd be successful in that role. All of my background was in education.

She said that she did not want a health minister who thought she knew more than the medical experts. She did not want a health minister who thought she knew more than the workers on the front line. She wanted a health minister who would gather the evidence, gather the information, and empower those with the expertise to be able to make the decisions that needed to be made and that I could gather that evidence around keeping in my lane and engaging on what's actually government responsibility.

The first time that was really tested, Mr. Speaker, was when I came into my office and on my desk – I didn't have an inbox – was a piece of paper from a family appealing to the minister to have an experimental drug treatment for their child. It was something that I didn't know was actually in legislation, that somebody who wasn't a medical expert was going to be making a decision about whether or not this medical treatment would be beneficial for this child or not.

The reason why it came to me is because it had a monetary impact. It was about a million dollars for what was seen as an experimental drug treatment on a child. I was not the expert to make that decision, but the legislation said that it was my responsibility. That day I said: sure, let's try it. I didn't engage in that decision lightly, but I wasn't going to take it on my conscience that a child may have had a chance to live if I would have signed that piece of paper. Then I said: but what we're going to do tomorrow is create a structure where the experts are the ones that make these decisions. We delegated authority around out-of-province, out-of-country travel as well as specific medications.

It is not the job of anyone in this place to get between a health professional and their patient. I was able to sleep at night knowing that the experts were going to be the ones that made those decisions for those patients.

This government has chosen to do the opposite. This government has chosen to put itself in between parents, children, and health care providers, and the consequences could very well be deadly. The research is quite clear. I will say that there have been lots of studies, Canadian studies, around the impacts on children who are queer or, specifically, trans. The mental health of trans youth already is the lowest mental health rating for any group within our society. The incidences of homelessness are higher. The incidences of self-harm are much higher, and that's why so many other organizations have

brought in protections – other orders of government, for example, the Edmonton public school board, other school boards across Alberta, the federal government – around putting safeguards in place to help protect some of the vulnerable.

This government, however, the current UCP government here in Alberta, has decided that it is a time right now in which they will take away those rights and literally break the law. We know the reason why is because it's been broken in this legislation, specifically that the government names notwithstanding and three different pieces of legislation twice that it knows are in conflict of what the law actually currently says.

The first one that I'll touch on is the Charter bill of rights, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The government admits in this piece of legislation that they are breaking sections 2 and 17 through 15, and then they also acknowledge that they're breaking the Alberta Bill of Rights and the Alberta Human Rights Act, bringing in legislation already that's been passed, saying that they are going to acknowledge that they are breaking other laws, including laws that have been amended under this government's time.

The two provincial bills are the Alberta Bill of Rights, which was amended just last year, Mr. Speaker, to account for folks who didn't . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** I hesitate to interrupt, but there are conversations going on in here that could probably be quieter or taken somewhere else.

Carry on.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That was the Alberta Bill of Rights, which was amended just last year around protecting the rights of people who didn't want to have medical procedures done to them, understandably. Then the other piece was the Alberta Human Rights Act, which was amended in 2023. Again, both of these under the current government of the day, and the government is knowingly today breaking the laws that they themselves amended just within the last two years.

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

**Ms Hoffman:** No, thank you. But I appreciate the ask. Maybe next time.

The fundamental rights of Albertans are what's being questioned here through this bill, and I want to take a moment to tell another personal story. I'm a little bit old school in that I expect all of the young people in my life that are in close relationship with me, whether it's through blood or through close family, to call me auntie. I in turn call them all my nieces and nephews.

I will tell you a little bit about a niece I have who started junior high this year, and that is a tricky time of year. You're figuring out whether or not the friendships that you had from elementary school are going to continue. You're trying new things. You have new opportunities to learn new subject areas and make friends with a larger pool, especially at Edmonton, where the cohort of students is much larger in junior high than it was in elementary school. What was the first thing that she had to bring home that first week of school, when you want to be talking about: who do you have lunch with and are you going to try out for any activities? It was a permission slip saying that she indeed was anatomically born with the genitals assigned to being female; therefore, she should be allowed to try out for the girls' volleyball team.

This conversation happened in kitchens and living rooms all across the province with these young girls in grade 7 trying to – again, I believe that this put parents in a really awkward position because a lot of parents don't want to have to tell anybody about

their children's genitals. Maybe talk about it with a doctor, but having to disclose to a school, having to be put in that position to sign the form just so the kid could try out for a sports team – whether or not you make the team, you had to have the form signed before you could even show up and try to make some friends and try something new like seeing if you can make the volleyball team.

I will say that she is very mature for her age. She said: “I understand if you don't want to sign this form. I understand why it's bad. I don't like this form either. I just really want to have a chance to try out for this team.” Parents across the province were put in this really uncomfortable situation where they had to choose between letting their child down from being able to participate in something or doing something that was against their own moral fibre in terms of discussing their child's genitals, their child's anatomy, with somebody that isn't their doctor.

5:40

It was a really awkward time for that specific child and, I'm sure, for many, many others. For the government to think that they know best and to try to execute something that feels like dog-whistle politics, that had an impact on so many children right across this province, especially children that we know are already more likely to experience houselessness, to self-harm, to suffer chronic depression and manic depression, I think is so wrong-headed.

Now, this bill doesn't undo any of the harm that was caused in previous sittings of the Legislature. It just gives the government more opportunity to talk about intentionally breaking the laws that already exist to target one group of people right now, one group of people today. I am going to say that I do not believe the government has the expertise to be able to make these decisions on behalf of others. Whether I was in government or not, I don't believe I would have the expertise to make these decisions for others. I feel that these are important conversations to have between children, their guardians, and their health care providers. And that's it.

I think that putting ourselves in between those relationships is highly problematic. I will also say that there weren't any youth who were engaging in medical treatments who were minors who weren't emancipated without parental involvement and guardian involvement and consent, very frankly. There have been a number of people using very inflamed language to describe a doctor-patient relationship and the potential consequences of that relationship in a really disrespectful way. I think the government would be wise to stay in their lane, to follow the laws that they themselves have passed, to make sure that every Albertan, no matter what their status is in terms of their gender identity, their religion, their racialized status, their economics, would have the ability to access and to be seen as an equal citizen under the law, the laws that are both federal and the laws that are also provincial.

It is a great responsibility to be elected to this Chamber. It is a great responsibility to be put in the cabinet and to have the authority to bring forward government bills and change laws. Also, with that comes the responsibility of knowing that all of us, whether we drafted this legislation or not, will be voting on this, and we'll be saying whether or not we think it's right to break the law, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Alberta Bill of Rights, and the Alberta Human Rights Act for this specific group of individuals. That voting record will absolutely – we will be held to account for that. Whether it is being held to account for it in potentially an upcoming election, whether it's in two years, whether it's sooner, or whether it's a day far into the future where we reflect on our contributions that we've made to the province of Alberta, this, I think, is one of the bills that people are going to have to pause and reflect on.

I will also add that in the lead-up to the 2015 election, upon which I was first elected to this Chamber, there were a number of then PC members who voted on legislation that forced children out of school if they wanted to form a support group. I will say that I never expected to be door-knocking in Edmonton-Glenora and have people talk about children being forced out of school as one of their key issues. But what it spoke to, Mr. Speaker, was about character and about the misuse of power. Many other issues came up as well, but that one came up time and time again. I know that there were members of this Chamber who didn't agree with it but voted for it because it was the party's bill that was put forward. It was a government bill, and I know that it impacted some of their relationships in the community in a long-lasting way, and it absolutely impacted their electoral outcomes as well.

Mr. Speaker, the government does not belong in a doctor's office. The government should not be making decisions about what happens in those doctors' offices. And the government certainly doesn't belong in between the doctor, the parent, and the child when it comes to making these decisions about delaying things that could negatively impact them in terms of their own mental health and well-being.

I think everyone wants to have kids be kids and take their time and grow up to become adults who have a great sense of self, a great self-confidence. I absolutely want that for every single child. And if you feel alone, know that you're not. Know that there are lots of people in this province, and the number keeps growing every day, who love you and have your back.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

**Mr. van Dijken:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with a deep sense of responsibility, a responsibility to the children and youth of Alberta whose futures we, as a body, are entrusted to protect. Every day parents across the province make sacrifices, face challenges, and pour their hearts into raising their children, and we owe it to them and to their children to stand firm in the protection of children.

Let me be clear. Bill 9 and the use of the notwithstanding clause are not decisions we take lightly. These are measures born out of principle, out of love, and out of unwavering commitment to the well-being of Alberta children. They are meant to: one, protect our children from irreversible choices; two, honour the sacred role of parents in guiding their children; and, three, ensure fairness and safety in our sports.

Let me remind the House what these laws do, which laws we're speaking to. First, Bill 26, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2), protects children from medical interventions that carry irreversible consequences. Through Bill 26 there will be no gender reassignment surgery for anyone under 18 and no puberty blockers or hormone treatments for children under 16.

Second, Bill 27, the Education Amendment Act, 2024, strengthens the role of parents in their children's lives, ensuring parents are informed, consulted, and involved when their children wish to change their name or pronouns or when sensitive topics around gender and sexuality arise in the schools.

Finally, Bill 29, the Fairness and Safety in Sport Act, ensures that women's and girls' sports remain safe and fair, reserved for those born female. This is not about exclusion. This is about fairness, safety, and common sense.

Mr. Speaker, it is critical that our children have the chance to grow, to explore, and to discover who they are. Childhood is a time that should be free from pressures that can shape their lives forever. At the heart of this growth is the loving guidance of parents. Nothing is more essential than a parent's duty to nurture, protect, and guide their child with wisdom, care, and unwavering love.

Parents are the ones who know their children best, who comfort them in fear, celebrate their triumphs, and help them navigate life's most important choices. Their role is sacred, and it must be respected.

This is why our government has introduced Bill 9, which will invoke the notwithstanding clause enshrined in section 33 of our Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms to ensure that these laws stand without the uncertainty of prolonged court battles. When it comes to children, every day counts and delay can come at a high cost.

Mr. Speaker, the notwithstanding clause exists for moments precisely like this, moments when the will of the people expressed through their democratically elected representatives must be upheld with clarity and conviction. It exists so that when the stakes are this high and when the well-being of children and families is on the line, the authority of those who are directly accountable to the public, the elected legislative branch of government, is not overridden by those who are not elected, the appointed judicial branch of government.

We must remember that the notwithstanding clause is not an attack on the courts, nor is it a rejection of the important role judges play in interpreting our laws. Rather, it is a constitutional safeguard written intentionally into our Charter to ensure that ultimate decision-making power in a democracy remains with the people. The people choose the elected people to represent them. Judges are appointed; legislators are elected. Judges interpret the law; legislators create it. Both roles matter, but only one is ultimately answerable to the voters. The notwithstanding clause protects that balance.

**5:50**

Mr. Speaker, recognizing parents as the primary caregivers in their children's lives is not controversial. It's common sense, and it reflects the values of the vast majority of Albertans. This is not about ideology. This is not about political posturing. This is about the children. This is about their safety, their innocence, and their ability to grow into adulthood without undue pressure or irreversible decisions made before they are ready to make those decisions. It is about families. It is about strengthening the bond between parents and children and ensuring that those bonds are respected and not undermined from outside the family.

In recent years, Mr. Speaker, many Albertans watched with concern as major decisions affecting children have increasingly shifted from parents to institutions, school boards, agencies, and, yes, the courts. While each plays an important role, none of them replace the foundational authority of parents. When that balance begins to tip too far, the Legislature has both the right and the responsibility to correct it.

That is exactly why the notwithstanding clause is part of our constitutional framework. It ensures that when a democratically elected government believes strongly that protecting children and empowering parents is necessary, it has the ability to act and not allow for the court to delay the process. It ensures that the people, not the judiciary, are the final guardians of public policy in a democratic society. Our courts are essential, but so is the democratic will of Albertans. The notwithstanding clause is what maintains that equilibrium. It prevents any one branch of our system, whether judicial, executive, or legislative, from holding all the power. It ensures that the rights of citizens, including their right to self-govern through elected representatives, remain protected.

Bill 9, the Protecting Alberta's Children Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, is an act of love, courage, and duty. It protects the ability of children to grow and mature before making decisions that will impact the rest of their lives. It reinforces the vital role of parents in guiding, loving, and protecting their children. Parents, not bureaucrats, not

activists, know their children best. Parents are the ones who wake up in the night when their child is sick, who comfort them in fear, and who rejoice in their triumphs. It is parents who must guide these decisions, not outside influences. It ensures fairness and safety in sports, protecting women and girls and ensuring they compete on an even playing field and have the opportunity to participate in sport.

Mr. Speaker, what our government believes in is clear. We believe that it is not the role of the state to come between parent and child, especially when it comes to matters of health, education, and identity. That is why parental consent is required when students wish to change names or pronouns, why educational resources on sensitive topics require ministerial approval, and why parental opt-in is mandatory for instruction on these topics in schools. These measures, that are enshrined in Bill 26, Bill 27, and Bill 29, are about protection, not exclusion. They are about giving children the time and space to grow while honouring the sacred bond between parent and child. The notwithstanding clause is a constitutional tool designed to ensure the will of the people is respected. By invoking it, we stand firmly with parents, with children, and with the moral duty that comes with leadership.

Mr. Speaker, protecting children is not just a legislative duty; it is a moral imperative. By enacting these laws, we are sending a clear message that parents are at the heart of their children's lives and every child deserves a safe, fair, and nurturing environment to grow up in. Let us protect our children. Let us respect our parents. Let us uphold the values that make Alberta strong. Let us act with courage, conviction, and love.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to speak to some of the discussion that previous members the Member for Livingstone-Macleod and the Member for Edmonton-Glenora brought forward with regard to the changing understanding within this field of study and with regard to seeking the wisdom of others to try and guide our decision-making in this place. The wisdom of others is largely based off the proper application of knowledge that's known at the time. What has become very evident is that the knowledge that is known is changing with the experience that has come forward. I truly believe that we in this place have to ensure that we stay understanding of that knowledge and are willing to actually take into consideration the changing dynamics within that knowledge to ensure that we protect the most vulnerable, the children that are experiencing childhood. The innocence of childhood should not be damaged by the changing of influences from outside of their well-being.

With that, I will close my remarks. Thank you for that opportunity.

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

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 9. Basically, the government has invoked the notwithstanding clause through the introduction of this bill on the previously introduced and passed bills 26, 27, and 29. I do not have a lot of time left, but I do want to start with the comment that I heard from the other side about the purpose and origin of the notwithstanding clause. I'm a student of law, and that's the first time I've heard that explanation, that this clause was put in the Constitution so that politicians can keep the judiciary in check. That's the first time I've heard this explanation. I went to school for four years, three years of law school, articulated after that for a year, and practised for three years. Never once did any legal scholar, anybody, ever mention that novel understanding of section 33. No one is better off listening to that explanation.

The second thing I would say is that this bill says that these bills will operate notwithstanding that they violate section 2 and sections 7 to 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Alberta

Bill of Rights, and the Alberta Human Rights Act. This is coming from this government, this Premier who claims to be the most freedom-loving Premier this province has ever had, a caucus that has members who went all the way to Ottawa with a trucker convoy over just some restrictions such as masks. And now they are attacking the rights, the basic fundamental rights of a group of Canadians who are guaranteed those rights by the Constitution of

Canada, section 2. Section 2 is the right that most fundamental freedoms that are guaranteed to every . . .

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, with my apologies, the House is now adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]







## Table of Contents

Prayers .....	467
Introduction of Visitors .....	467
Introduction of Guests .....	467
Members' Statements	
International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women .....	468
Bill 11 .....	468
Crime and Public Safety .....	468
Chiropractic Care .....	468
Bill 11 .....	469
Support for Persons with Disabilities .....	469
Statement by the Speaker	
Questions by Parliamentary Secretaries .....	469
Oral Question Period	
Physician Compensation Model .....	470, 476
Election Recall Petitions .....	470
Justice System Concerns .....	471
Auditor General's Report on DynaLife Contract .....	471, 476
Information Requests on Public Safety and Emergency Services Minister .....	472
Bill 13 .....	473, 475
Election Recall Legislation .....	473
Government Policies .....	474
Coal Litigation Settlements .....	474
Support for Forestry Industry .....	475
Emergency Medical Services .....	477
Presenting Petitions .....	478
Introduction of Bills	
Bill 8    Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 .....	478
Bill 12    Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2) .....	478
Tabling Returns and Reports .....	478
Orders of the Day .....	480
Government Bills and Orders	
Committee of the Whole .....	480
Bill 7    Water Amendment Act, 2025 .....	480
Second Reading .....	493
Bill 9    Protecting Alberta's Children Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 .....	493

