



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, November 25, 2025

Day 15

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

Second Session

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

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Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
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Gray, Hon. Christina, ECA, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
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Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Hayter, Julia K.U., Calgary-Edgemont (NDP)
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(UC)
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Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP),
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Wright, Justin, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UC)
Wright, Peggy K., Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),
Deputy Government Whip
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 47

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 2

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Jason Stephan	Parliamentary Secretary for Constitutional Affairs
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Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 25, 2025

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, good evening. Please be seated.

Government Motions

Auditor General Search

13. Mr. Williams moved on behalf of Mr. Schow:
Be it resolved that
- (a) the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices be appointed for the purpose of inviting applications for the position of Auditor General and to recommend to the Assembly the applicant it considers most suitable for that position;
 - (b) reasonable disbursements by the committee for advertising, staff assistance, equipment and supplies, rent, travel, and other expenditures necessary for the effective conduct of its responsibilities shall be paid subject to the approval of the chair;
 - (c) in carrying out its responsibilities, the committee may utilize
 - (i) the services of members of the public service employed in a department with the concurrence of the head of that department, and
 - (ii) the staff employed by the Assembly;
 - (d) the committee may, without leave of the Assembly, sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued;
 - (e) when its work has been completed, the committee shall
 - (i) if the Assembly is sitting, report to the Assembly, or
 - (ii) if the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued, release its report by depositing a copy with the Clerk and forwarding a copy to each member of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, this is a debatable motion.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Government Motion 13, effectively establishing the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices as a search committee to find a new Auditor General for the province of Alberta. In speaking to the motion, I thought it was important for us to consider some context, because, I'll be clear, I intend to vote in support of this motion because to not support the motion would be to leave the province without an Auditor General, but I think it's important to establish some of the context and some of the concerns we have on our side of the aisle going into this search committee.

To clarify the timeline of events, on October 21, 2025, the then chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices wrote to the current Auditor General, Mr. Doug Wylie, and asked if he was interested in continuing his contract. So the first outreach he had from the government member who was then sitting as the chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices was asking him if he was interested in extending his contract. Indeed, the Auditor General, Mr. Doug Wylie, wrote back on October 28, 2025. He said he thanked the chair for his letter, and he said: yes, absolutely I would like to seek a contract extension. He asked for a contract

extension to October 1 of 2028, approximately a two-year extension to his current term. He said: there are important considerations behind this request, and I would welcome the opportunity to discuss my decision and the rationale with you.

What occurred, Madam Speaker, is that government members did not allow Mr. Wylie to have that opportunity to address the committee to explain his rationale. Government members of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices simply voted, put forward a motion outright to simply reject Mr. Wylie's interest and proceed with a search committee.

Now, this is concerning, Madam Speaker, because we know that Mr. Wylie is currently in the midst of two very important pieces of work: one, doing an audit of the dissolution of Alberta Health Services, all of the work this government has done dismantling the former infrastructure of our health care system, and secondly, the 11 new bodies, bureaucracies which this government has created in the aftermath.

This is significant, Madam Speaker. This is going to be the work of the next Auditor General, but the work of the current Auditor General is looking at how all of those pieces have been taken apart. Mr. Wylie when he was at committee was very clear about the significance of this, that we are talking about millions of dollars of infrastructure changing hands: hospitals, health centres, significant changes in that structure.

It's important, Madam Speaker, that when we are doing an undertaking of that, because these are assets that belong to Albertans, we are tracking every dollar, where it's going, how it's moving, especially given that we have just seen in another report from the Auditor General that when this government undertook to sign a private contract with DynaLife, which also involved the transfer of assets back and forth and that sort of thing, we had a \$125 million cost to taxpayers, loss. It's absolutely essential that when the government is undertaking something on this massive of a scale we have proper oversight of procedure. Now, unfortunately, government members didn't see fit to listen to Mr. Wiley at that committee either and ensure that he had the dollars to contract to undertake that work immediately. They're forcing him to wait another month.

Coming back to the motion we have in front of us to strike a search committee to replace Mr. Wylie, government members are also choosing to interrupt that work and make it more difficult for Albertans to have accountability.

Secondly, Mr. Wiley is currently in the midst of a one of the most significant undertakings, I think, any Auditor General in this province has ever done in the investigation of the corrupt care scandal. Now, Mr. Wiley has been very clear that he is nowhere near done in that work. That was one of the chief reasons Mr. Wiley wanted to request that extension, wanted to come and speak to committee, something that was denied to him by these government members. They wouldn't even hear him out.

But as we look now at this search committee to find a new Auditor General, it's worth remembering that the previous Auditor General wanted to remain. He said: I felt it was useful for the office, useful for the project of the office for me to be here for another two years to see this work through. He said: "I honestly don't know what the rationale is. Nothing was related to me. There was no discussion with me at all." I would share Mr. Wiley's concerns. The government provided no rationale. Now, certainly, one can infer that a government currently under investigation by the Auditor General might not want to continue with that Auditor General. It could certainly be advantageous for a government to have a change in that Auditor General, the interruption of that transition, the delay of the work that's being done.

Now, government members have said, the Minister of Justice has said that there's no precedent for an automatic extension of a contract. No, absolutely. There has been no automatic extension, but what there has been at many times – Madam Speaker, I can tell you as a member of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices since I first became an MLA 10 and a half years ago, that there are many precedents of an actual discussion at that committee. Indeed, when we had an extension of the Ethics Commissioner's contract, we, in fact, invited the Ethics Commissioner to come and speak. The members at that time actually heard her out and had that discussion and, indeed, did choose to extend her contract. But in this case these government members were not interested in affording the same to Mr. Wiley.

Now, again, Mr. Wiley has been very clear that his work is not done on this investigation into very credible allegations of political interference by this government in the contracting of surgical contracts, in seeing these contracts go to a friend and supporter of this government, what's potentially one of the greatest scandals we've had in Alberta's history. Now, he has said that he is going to endeavour to do as much of this work as possible. He is going to scramble, but, of course, we have seen that this is a government that isn't above denying resources to legislative officers to do their work when that work is not favourable to them, as we saw them deny the funding to the Chief Electoral Officer to be able to conduct the recall petitions, which I believe have now amounted to 14 against this government.

This is why we are deeply concerned, Madam Speaker. As we move forward on selecting a new Auditor General, it is under a dark shadow in the face of a government that is making a name for itself in terms of being known for political interference with the independent public bodies, with investigations, with the recent report that came out that showed all kinds of documents that were redacted, that were password coded so they couldn't be read, in fact, documents that were destroyed under this government purview.

There is no reason that, I think, any Albertan, Madam Speaker – certainly we in the opposition do not trust this government in terms of their motivations in putting forward this search committee at a time when Mr. Wiley is doing such important work on behalf of Albertans in the investigation of this very government. But I look forward. We will have the opportunity, I guess a week from Friday, to speak with Mr. Wiley and see if these government members will step up with the funding that's required to actually do due diligence on the decisions this government has made or whether they're once again going to try to duck and cover.

7:40

In the meantime I think it's important to acknowledge that this is the status, this is the place that we find ourselves in as we look at this motion to strike a search committee for the next Auditor General of Alberta. I do look forward to having the opportunity to participate in that committee, though I would have much preferred to see Mr. Wylie given the opportunity to extend his contract for the two years or at least to even have had the chance to talk to us about it.

But I can say that for our part our members will endeavour to ensure that the next Auditor General has the same ethics, has the same commitment to the work, has the same belief in doing that work on behalf of the people of Alberta, not for the favour of any government, that the next Auditor General embodies all of those same stellar qualities which Mr. Wiley has embodied and his predecessor Merwan Saher before him, because it is absolutely essential that Albertans know governments will be held to account, that if there is corruption, it will be sought out, it will be found out,

and it will be reviewed.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others that wish to join the debate? Seeing none, would the hon. Deputy Government House Leader like to close the debate?

Mr. Williams: I'm happy to pass.

[Government Motion 13 carried]

Adjournment of Fall Sitting

14. Mr. Williams moved on behalf of Mr. Schow:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 3(9) the 2025 fall sitting of the Assembly is extended until Thursday, December 11, 2025, unless on an earlier date the Government House Leader advises the Assembly that its business for the sitting is concluded.

[Government Motion 14 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 6

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

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

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

[Adjourned debate on the amendment November 24: Mr. Dach]

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

Mr. Eggen: Well, Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I welcome the opportunity to make some comments on this amendment. You know, Bill 6 came in the wake of probably the biggest disruption to the education system in the history of this province. Waiting with bated breath to see what the government's next move in regard to public education was going to be, and they brought in some more testing for grade 3s who, you probably know, Madam Speaker, are six or seven years old, and standardized testing is not really high on their priority list.

In fact, it's an entirely inappropriate reaction to what was needed here in the province, which was to try to stabilize the situation. The 51,000 teachers were on strike for more than three weeks, and hundreds of thousands of students were not getting their education. It literally turned the province upside down. So, you know, what the government needed to do at that very moment was to try to offer some reassurance to Albertans that they were in charge and that they were going to try to rectify the situation that was of their own doing, by the way, a manufactured crisis that resulted in the 51,000 teachers in the province of Alberta losing their constitutional rights by this government's use of the notwithstanding clause.

All of those things happening in a three-week period – we're still recovering from that, as if we ever have – and the government's answer to that was to bring in more standardized testing for grade 3s in the province of Alberta for numeracy and for language. The strike was a whole lot to do, Madam Speaker, around classroom

conditions for students and for teachers and everyone else and parents and for the state of education.

We know that class size was too large. We know that a lot of students were not getting the levels of numeracy and language skills that they needed to move through the system and were falling behind, that classrooms are overcrowded, all of these things. Underfunding, right? We have many more students showing up into the province, and the provincial government failed to fund for growth. You know, instead what they chose to do is to bring in more standardized testing.

You know, there are so many questions about that, and then this amendment speaks to that directly. There are lots of students in many different states of ability and disability in our classrooms. They're very complex and have never been more complex. You know, standardized tests go right up against that, directly in opposition, and without logic nor reason, especially when it's for seven-year-olds, Madam Speaker. You know, these kids need attention. They need the assessment that goes on every day, every minute, in a classroom by the classroom teacher – right? – they don't need to be shuffled through these standardized tests, you know, that take up several hours of the day and take up part of a week of instruction, especially at a time when we've lost three weeks of instruction as a result of these teachers being locked out by this government.

There are so many contradictions built into this, Madam Speaker. At the same time they brought in more standardized tests for seven-year-old children, they also said, "Oh, you know, because of the strike, people don't have to write the departmentals if they don't want to," which are standardized tests – that's exactly what they are – and they do have some bearing.

You know, seven-year-olds writing standardized tests doesn't help them get a university position, but the grade 12 departmentals sure do – right? – because that is part of what universities and colleges and polytechnics look at from those students to see if they can get in because there are so few positions in Alberta right now, spots in postsecondary. The standards are very, very high, abnormally and unconscionably high, because this government failed to build more positions in postsecondary. You can see how this is going, Madam Speaker, right? Just literally a domino effect of inaction and mismanagement of both our postsecondary and K to 12 education systems.

There we are, Madam Speaker. The minister's saying, "Oh, well, you know, you can't write the departmentals this year," which is like the ultimate in standardized testing, right? I mean, that's the big one, right? Grade 12. We get all sweaty just thinking about it, right? Yeah. Oh no, you know, we're not going to do those, but we're going to bring in new ones for seven-year-olds – right? – who are just kind of figuring out where the bathroom is, you know, and getting it together, right?

I mean, I found it to be just, you know, trite and out of touch and, once again, using something like standardized testing not to help the kids, but to use it as a stick to hang over the heads of the teachers, right? They're not teaching for three weeks and then we're going to bring in more standardized tests and if your exam results are not up to par, then, you know, it's your fault, teacher, not the fault of the education system or the fault of overcrowding or underfunding or all those things. Oh, no, it's you who did that, teacher, and you better be careful or we'll cut your pay or something like that. I mean, it's absolutely ridiculous, and it's absolutely the backwards way to run an education system.

The success of our students and the teachers who are teaching them depends on respecting the integrity and the professionalism of those teachers who are there to do the job. If you do it just by

hanging numbers over their heads – I mean, I don't know, what are you going to do with all these numbers, Madam Speaker? I mean, we gather up all this information on seven-year-olds and put it in a filing cabinet. I mean, it's patently absurd.

I mean, I know something about these things. I was a teacher for 20 years, right? Taught up to grade 12 diplomas, for sure, and, you know, my assessment of those grade 12s was pretty much usually comparable to how they achieved on the tests. I felt that I was certainly able to give them a fair, responsible assessment of their abilities as they moved on in their lives.

7:50

I remember, as well, as the minister of education, we had those terrible fires in Fort McMurray, right? I chose to make the grade 12 diplomas for those students optional as well, and – you know what? – those students did just fine. They used their teacher assessments during the year, and those assessments served them well for their future endeavours.

This amendment certainly tries to make a little bit of lemonade out of lemons here, but, I mean, Bill 6 really is just embarrassing, because, as I said, we underwent the worst upheaval in our history of public education, and we needed something desperately to try to calm things down, and we end up with Bill 6, giving more tests to seven-year-olds. It's ridiculous.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to check in with my whip. I think we're going for 12 to 15 minutes here?

Member Irwin: Yeah, okay. Aim for 10 for sure.

Mr. Kasawski: Okay. Madam Speaker, happy to rise to get as much time to debate Bill 6 as possible because, I've got to tell you, we've come through a period of great strife in our education system, which has highlighted, really, some of the big challenges. I just want to say I'm rising to speak in defence of publicly funded education. I think this amendment would provide a better standing for public education in this province.

The very reason I ran for elected office: I believe deeply that publicly funded education is the greatest equalizer of our society. It offers the highest return to society of any dollar invested, shaping the minds of children, empowering families, and building stronger communities. It's a bedrock of opportunity.

Today with the, you know, attempt to repair Bill 6 with an amendment but with the introduction of Bill 6 that came in from the government, I'm finding myself on the opposite side of the House from the government, and I do so resolutely in support of publicly funded education that in Alberta can and should be the very best system of publicly funded education in the world.

Time and again this government tends to invoke its relative priorities as justification for clawing back money for the supports of disabled Albertans, those on AISH, for failing to invest adequately in women's shelters, or refusing to implement meaningful measures to help youth find their first job in this province, which has led to the highest unemployment rate for youth in the country, yet when it comes to investing in our children, investing in K to 12 public education, they refuse to act, Madam Speaker, and instead of committing resources, they're introducing more bureaucracy, classic UPC.

An Hon. Member: UCP.

Mr. Kasawski: That's why I can't support Bill 6. [interjections]

Madam Speaker, the branding is working on some people it's reaching.

Madam Speaker, underfunding is the real problem, not a lack of assessment. There's no denying that our K to 12 education system is chronically underfunded since the UPC got elected. According to the Alberta's Teachers' Association and to the research done by the Fraser Institute, Alberta ranks last in Canada in per-student funding. I think what's most astonishing, Madam Speaker, is that after the government took away the right of teachers to strike, forcing a contract on them without negotiation, do you know where our ranking in per-student funding moved? It stayed at the lowest in the country. It's really discouraging when we see that. In 2022-23 we were at about 13,400 per student, and now we're at about 11,400 per student. As we know, with inflation, with everything, a dollar from 2023 won't buy what you can buy with it today. No, I've got that backwards. A dollar today could not buy what it could buy in 2023. That \$2,000 gap to the national average that would be the investment we would need to bring in in order to at least start catching up the resources that school boards could use to then lead to better outcomes for education.

Until we address funding, we cannot pretend that more assessments will solve the systematic deficiencies. The result of underfunding is already plain to see: overcrowded classrooms, fewer supports for students with complex needs, overworked teachers, and stretched resources. As one school board pointed out, between 2019 and 2024 the funding per student remained flat even as inflation eroded its real value by more than 20 per cent. That's, like, a 20 per cent cut to education in this province, Madam Speaker. It would make no sense to demand more assessments when what we lack are the basic investments to ensure quality teaching and learning.

When I talked with the local school boards last week, Madam Speaker, they've already got assessments in place. Local school boards, including those in my constituency, the Elk Island public schools and the Elk Island Catholic schools, already conduct assessments. These assessments are tied directly to curriculum and those outcomes. They allow teachers, classroom by classroom, to know if a student is falling behind, on track, or ahead. Teachers use that information to tailor instruction, provide support, intervene early, and plan for success. These are the people in the classroom, on the front-line, working day by day with children, not some theoretical exercise imposed from afar.

Yet Bill 6 proposes to remove these local assessments, replacing them with a centralized top-down regime. The assessments the government wants to impose are not tied to curriculum either, which feels like a misstep by the government. They'll deliver data, yes, but data about what school boards and teachers already know, data about students in classrooms, but data alone does not equate to support. Data alone will not fix overcrowded classrooms. It will not hire additional educational assistants. It will not build new schools.

Even when this government has data, they don't share it, and they certainly don't act on it. They set up task forces to avoid doing the work to make things better for Alberta. Albertans are asking you to start doing the work, provide the resources so that we can build a better education system in this province.

Centralized assessments won't help students with disabilities any more than the help that they're getting right now. It's sometimes argued that assessments could help identify students with disabilities or learning delays early, but disabilities are already assessed in different specialized ways with professional supports, supports that are being cut, it's worth mentioning to the families of Sherwood Park. One-size-fits-all standardized noncurriculum linked assessments will not replace that. It will not provide meaningful help, and it will not guarantee additional resources,

which is the problem, Madam Speaker: more resources for the school boards that will locally make decisions. We need investment, not more bureaucracy. If they would provide better funding, then associations in Sherwood Park could take better care of those people with disabilities: like Robin Hood that does great work with our disabled population in Sherwood Park.

I come from a business background, and I must say that this decision by the minister to bring more centralized assessment feels a lot like when a CEO of a corporation just can't get the report in front of them that will tell them how the business is operating because it's grown too large and they can't get the report in front of them that they want, so some consultants come in and sell them on a new operating system that they promise will provide a one-page report for all the key performance indicators that the CEO needs in order to run that corporation. They move to the centralized assessment and data collection, and it reminds me so much of when the corporations do this. Then what that results in is that the managers get asked to provide more information. The front-line workers get asked to provide more information. They're spending more time filling out paperwork and reports than they are doing their work. Then the output from the corporation goes down while they're transitioning to this new operating system.

8:00

We already have in this province a very good system of school boards making good local decisions with the resources that are given for the best way to allocate to the schools in their area. I'll get to that in a little bit, Madam Speaker. In Sherwood Park, part of the Elk Island school boards for Elk Island Catholic and Elk Island public, these are rural and urban both. There's a lot of attention paid to some of the largest school boards in this province, which are Calgary and Edmonton, and a lot of attention given to rural school boards by the rural MLAs, but we have a hybrid in Strathcona county, and it leads to some challenges that assessments are not going to fix.

On that difference between different school boards I just asked the question: when has a higher order of government ever done better than a properly resourced local government? When has bureaucracy ever done better than front-line workers and boots on the ground and more teachers in the classroom? What our schools need, what our children need, is not another layer of assessment but real investment, more classrooms, more teachers, more educational assistants, better support for English language learners as additional language learners are coming into our system, for students with special learning needs, for mental health supports, for safe and welcoming schools. This is what we need in our province, not more tests.

The problem is not a lack of data. It is a lack of funding and a lack of will to make education the highest relative priority in this province. As one of the largest boards of education recently noted, even the largest injection of funding today by roughly a billion dollars across the system would significantly improve class sizes, services, and support. It was remarkable recently when funding came in from a lawsuit that the province was passively a part of that brought in over \$1.7 billion into the Treasury and not a penny of it went towards education at the same time when we were crying from the rooftops and from the front steps of the Legislature for more funding for education. That is why Bill 6 fails to deliver.

Local context. Sherwood Park, Strathcona county, where we have a hybrid of urban and rural schools, it leads to complications and problems where utilization becomes the limiting factor for the ministry to determine whether Strathcona county needs more funding. We might have an underpopulated school in South Cooking Lake and we have growth on the north side of my riding

where Cambrian and Hearststone are building new communities with hundreds of new families and with those families there's a really good chance that kids will grow up having being bused out of their neighbourhood for their entire life before this government would even consider giving the funding to the Elk Island school boards to build a new school. Shameful.

We're looking to these new neighbourhoods that are north of the Yellowhead in Sherwood Park to accommodate them, Minister. I heard great news about Plamondon the other day getting a modernizing, the bustling metropolis of northern Alberta. It would be really important to note that there are some bustling urban areas that also could use some urbanization, some urbanized areas in Alberta that could also use a modern school. It's deeply unfair to those families.

We are all proud of Sherwood Heights. It's one where everybody working together and rowing in the same direction got a school board. I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-North West for getting that one going. Thank you very much, Member. That was extraordinary.

Mr. Eggen: I was a graduate as well.

Mr. Kasawski: Also a graduate from Sherwood Heights.

The key thing: when the government works together on all sides, we can get schools built in my riding. Let's just point the minister's attention towards the north part of my riding, which is growing and could use a school.

Ms Sweet: Not just UCP schools.

Mr. Kasawski: Not just UCP schools. I agree. I agree.

Madam Speaker, the men and women teaching in our classrooms from across Alberta, including in Sherwood Park, deserve better than this. They deserve respect. They deserve resources. They deserve a government that listens to real practitioners, teachers, principals, educational assistants, and school board trustees, not a government that listens only to theoretical professors who may have academic credentials but have never stood at the front of a grade 3 class teaching fractions or tried to guide an English language learner struggling to read.

Teachers already know what's going on in this classroom. They already see what children need and expect, what extra help they need, what supports they need. They need smaller classes. They need more resources. They need more attention. More assessment will do nothing like this. More assessment will not hire more teachers. More assessment will not bring new schools. More assessment will not reduce class sizes, improve support, or make life better for students, families, or educators, and we can be assured it will not help with complexity in the classroom.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Member Boparai: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak against Bill 6, the Education (Prioritizing Literacy and Numeracy) Amendment Act, 2025. This bill claims to prioritize literacy and numeracy, but in reality it prioritizes bureaucracy over real solutions.

The Deputy Speaker: Just to clarify we're on the reasoned amendment.

Member Boparai: Yeah. In support of the amendment here.

Albertan students and teachers do not need more distractions in the form of tests. They need real solutions, which is more supports for our school students and teachers. They need smaller class sizes, more educational assistants, and access to specialists like speech-language pathologists and occupational therapists. They need psychoeducational assessments that families can actually afford. Instead, this government is legislating standardized tests for kindergarten to grade 3, tests that may identify problems but with no plan to fix them, same as the track record of this UCP government.

What happens when a child scores poorly? Nothing, because there are no supports in place to help that child succeed. Madam Speaker, this is a distraction from the real crisis in education, a crisis caused by years of UCP underfunding and mismanagement, and I fear it's more than a distraction. It's a set-up weakening the private education system. Breaking the system; then act surprised when it's broken. Use those poor results as justification for further cuts to public education all while increasing funding for private schools connected to UCP insiders and friends.

Madam Speaker, I'm not sure when this UCP government will stop dancing to the tunes of their insiders. If the UCP truly cared about improving literacy and numeracy, they would have listened to teachers during the strike, not violate their Charter rights. Teachers told us what they need: smaller classes, more resources, and meaningful supports, not more tests. Madam Speaker, one word is missing for sure in the UCP's dictionary, and that is democracy.

8:10

If this UCP government truly cared about data, they wouldn't have stopped tracking the data that actually matters: classroom sizes back in 2019. That data would help us understand where resources are needed most. Instead, they ignored it, and now they want to impose tasks that will only confirm what teachers already know, which is that kids need help.

These tests will not teach a child to read. They will not help a child understand math. They will not reduce stress in overcrowded classrooms. What they will do is take time away from quality, meaningful, and practical learning, the kind of learning that actually helps children succeed. Teachers estimate that administering these tests takes over five hours per student, or three to five instructional days annually. That's time taken away from teaching, the very thing these tasks claim to improve.

Let's be clear. These tests are not age appropriate. The Alberta Teachers' Association has documented cases where young children became distressed, cried, or even harmed themselves during these assessments. For students with disabilities or English language learners these tests are not just ineffective; they are harmful. This just continues to show how little this UCP government cares about the well-being of Alberta's students.

Madam Speaker, let me bring this home to northeast Calgary and my riding of Calgary-Falconridge. This is one of the most diverse areas in Alberta. Families here pour their hearts into education because they know it's the key to building a better future for themselves and their children. But just like with everything else – insurances, utilities, health care, and minimum wage – this government couldn't care less about making life better for Calgary-Falconridge, for northeast Calgary, for Alberta, or people like us.

In Calgary-Falconridge classrooms are overcrowded. Teachers are managing 40 or more students, many with complex needs. Educational assistants are stretched thin. Families cannot afford private psychoeducational assessments, which cost upwards of \$3,000, yet the UCP voted down our bill to make those assessments accessible.

Madam Speaker, for English language learners these tests will be confusing and demoralizing. The Alberta Teachers' Association reports that ELL students often become emotional during these assessments because they don't understand the language. Some cry. Some refuse to come to school on test days. This is not how we build confidence; this is how we break the confidence.

Madam Speaker, let's not forget the broader affordability crisis. Families in northeast Calgary are already struggling with skyrocketing insurance premiums, rising utility bills, and stagnant wages. Now they're being told that the solution to improving education is more testing, not more teachers, not more supports, not more investment. It's just distraction over distraction over distraction.

Madam Speaker, Alberta used to have one of the best education systems in the world. In 2015 Alberta students ranked first in Canada and second globally in science, reading, and math. What changed? Funding. Today Alberta spends far below the national average, with our province being behind by \$1.5 billion in operational funding.

Now, instead of fixing these problems, the government is adding more tests that will produce data showing poor results that will be used to justify more cuts, more privatization, and more erosion of public education while funnelling more money into private schools connected to insiders and friends. And we all know what comes next: another taxpayer-funded panel stacked with their friends, just like we saw with the classroom sizes, a panel that delays re-election and wastes resources while students and teachers continue to struggle.

Madam Speaker, improving literacy and numeracy does not happen through standardized testing. It happens through investment in classrooms. It happens when teachers have the time and resources to teach. It happens when students get the help they need when they need it. But this UCP government keeps ignoring them.

That means smaller classroom sizes. That means hiring enough teachers and educational assistants, not one per school over three years, as this government proposed. That means funding psychoeducational assessments or providing in-school supports like speech and occupational therapy. Teachers are trained to identify learning challenges. They do not need a test to tell them what they already know; they need the tools to address those challenges.

Madam Speaker, Bill 6 is not about helping kids learn. It's about optics. It's about creating the illusion of action while ignoring the real problems. It's about setting up our public education system to fail so the government can say, "Look, it's broken," and push for privatization. I have witnessed, seen, and experienced first-hand where I came from: government stopped accountability and pushed people towards privatization. When you stop, this government will stop funding the public schools, the infrastructure. Then they can show that people will stop going to the public schools, and then they can show to Albertans that it's not good, and people will be forced to the private system, which lots of Albertans can't afford at this time.

Sometimes I feel sorry for the members opposite. They don't even know what they are doing. Voting for this bill is like a chicken voting for Colonel Sanders.

Madam Speaker, in Calgary-Falconridge, northeast Calgary, and across Alberta families are already struggling. They need a government that invests in their children, not one that burdens them with tests and then walks away. The Alberta NDP will oppose Bill 6 because we believe in real solutions: funding classrooms, supporting teachers, and giving every child the chance to succeed. Forever in solidarity with the teachers and students.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to speak to the reasoned amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to speak in favour of the reasoned amendment that Bill 6, Education (Prioritizing Literacy and Numeracy) Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2), be not now read a second time. I can read the whole amendment, but I think the members already know what is on their tables. It is very important to support this amendment given the circumstances, the issue at hand.

Madam Speaker, we all support numeracy and literacy, and we know how critical that is for any education system. We also know this is very important to build a foundation in any individual's life for lifelong learning or to be able to build their life and participate in the economy or fully engage in the community and participate in community and society. But as this bill has been brought forward by the education minister against the issue in the backdrop, it is very important to vote for this important reasoned amendment.

8:20

We have seen just before starting this session, about exactly a month ago when the schools were going to start, there were teachers, our students, and their parents in millions showing frustration for the UCP's continuous ignorance and rudeness toward the public education system. They waited six years under this UCP government to fix the education system, but the UCP kept ignoring it. Not only ignoring it; they actually made a bad situation worse.

Madam Speaker, in my riding I hear daily complaints from my constituents, parents, about shortage of capacity, their children not being able to join a school that is merely across from their home or residence they are living in. That was the property the parents purchased, with a higher cost than average, understanding that they will buy a home that will probably help their life for another six, seven years while their children are going to attend elementary school and they will not need to worry much in travelling time or the other responsibilities related to it. Then they find out, you know: your application is in the waiting line, and that has been put in the lottery system, so we will let you know if your child's name comes in the lottery or not. That is the situation that my constituents and neighbourhoods in my riding are going through.

I have been constantly in touch with my school board trustees. I have called them into my office to share their concerns. I have written to the superintendent of a school. But there's no resolution. They don't know what to do because the capacity is full. As we know, Edmonton public schools will be running at 100 per cent capacity in the year 2026-2027. That means every inch of space in that school will be used to sit the classrooms. That's one aspect of it. There will be no libraries, no gyms, no recreational activities. Other than that, those classes will not have an appropriate number of teachers to teach them. The one teacher might have 50 students, 60 students, and the complexity of the class they're facing . . .

An Hon. Member: He's just making it up.

Mr. Deol: The minister is welcome to speak, if you have something to add. Madam Speaker, I'll not be distracted. I'll stay focused on my topic.

It's very important for me to represent my constituents in the House. Many of them watch these debates live, and I strongly wanted to express their griefs and their views about the challenge they are facing right now. I can't use the words "they are very hopeful." They're not really hopeful right now.

What happened, actually, in the beginning of this session: the government did something historically unprecedented by using the

notwithstanding clause to force those educators, who have waited six long years under this government to fix this crisis, who finally came out and used their democratic rights, demanding to fix the very issues in the system.

What a unique thing I have experienced in my life, living 32 years in this neighbourhood: the very first time the students took the initiative to support their teachers, what they were calling for. And I know many of the members of this House wanted to share this similar experience they have in their lives, the number of Albertans who got out of their homes to show solidarity with teachers or felt this was their own issue in very hot topics, and they wanted to find a resolution. They wanted immediate resolution, and it was shameful that the government, instead of proposing the solution on the table with those teachers, used something that has never been used in the history of this province to maul someone's democratic rights that are enshrined in Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Madam Speaker, I'm actually very surprised. What is confusing in this whole situation, that the minister does not understand? Instead of providing solutions to those challenges, the minister thought to bring this Bill 6 into the House. How important this was that he felt kind of an emergency to bring this bill in, instead of spending this House's precious time to focus on the very issues that haven't gone anywhere. That issue's still around. It'll come back. Those teachers have been forced by the legality of law, we can call it today, but those parents are still facing those challenges.

Those students with learning disabilities and complexity of our languages – you know, my riding is a multicultural riding where more than 60 per cent of the population is ethnic, multicultural. People move from around the world, from a different part of the world to build their life. My riding keeps growing. Three ridings combined in the southeast had more than 100 per cent population than the average population in any riding. Can the UCP tell me, like, how many schools they have built in those ridings in those six years? The population has grown more than a hundred per cent of the average population in any riding, with zero new schools in six years. There is still no school under construction in all these ridings. I'm not even talking about my riding. It's all of these ridings.

8:30

Alberta has, you know, the lowest funding per student in the education system, \$2,000 less than the national average funding, with 48 students in a class. The government hired one teacher for 48 students. You can just estimate how big of a gap that is that we are asking those teachers to pick up on their backs without giving proper support to them. If you consider the highest per capita student funding, then we are probably \$3,000 behind a province like Quebec; \$150,000 of funding gaps per classroom in Alberta right now. How is it going to contribute to the education system or to the issue we are facing in schools today?

Madam Speaker, I strongly recommend that all House members – this is a reasoned amendment that only tells, like, let's not vote in second reading. Let's go back in the committee and spend more time, come together with consensus, focusing on fixing the issues in the education system.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to the amendment put forward by my learned colleague the Member for Calgary-Mountain View and to speak to

Bill 6 once more in debate. In particular, I truly do wonder what the benefit of this bill will provide to Albertans. How does the minister retaining additional information on Albertans help with the underfunding of the education system that is entirely their fault? This amendment is absolutely necessary to consider the ancillary effects that standardized testing will have on children with disabilities in this province. Further, it puts additional strain onto our already overburdened educators in schools. It does not bring the expertise of folks in various professions like speech-language pathology. It does not address the complexity in classes. Instead, it makes our youngest learners go through unnecessary standardized testing.

Worse yet, disability advocates are calling this legislation ableist. I have a wonderful constituent who visits my office and this House on a regular basis who wants me to remind this government of her experience with segregated education. Her name is Tarra. Tarra underwent education at a time when disabled folks were removed from the classroom because her government did not put value in the adequate social needs of disabled students. She wants me to remind this House that segregation does not work. She is afraid that this is where the government is going to start, by weeding out kiddos with disabilities with this unnecessary standardized testing that the minister wants educators to do, because they do not have enough to do as it is. We sure know this government isn't giving them the real relief after forcing them back to work while also stripping away their Charter rights.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation is much ado about nothing. It gives the government more power, more overreach, and less accountability for the fact that they have underfunded education in our province, resulting in the lowest per capita student funding in all of the country. No mental gymnastics on the part of any of those cabinet members across the way or fictitious number crunching by the Premier rids this government of its abysmal record of the lowest per capita student funding across the country. The stats prove this incompetence.

We used to be heralded for the greatest education system in Canada. My colleague from Calgary-Falconridge spoke about them a few moments ago. We saw the slip in ranking that happened under the UCP government, and it's not hard to see the link in this drop caused by a lack of funding per student using '22-23 data, where this government spent \$11,464 per student per year, behind the national average, which is \$13,692. Mr. Speaker, that is just unacceptable.

I know this minister likes to talk about how this bill will address complexity in classrooms. It remains to be seen how. How will ministerial collection of information requiring the data to be sent directly to his office help? We know that the only way to address the complexity in classrooms is by funding supports to address complexity in classrooms. Full stop. Instead of blaming children with disabilities and the families that are doing their best with a system that does not support them for complexity – and even to allege violence in the classroom because of a lack of resources misses the mark in so many ways, Mr. Speaker.

Look at the applications of FSCD in this province. I can assure you that every member in this Chamber has had an e-mail about the delay in FSCD applications, the backlog of cases that families are forced to go through because of this government's absolute failure when it comes to supporting FSCD. Mr. Speaker, we know that there are wait times of up to two years for families because of this government's absolute failure. That's the going wait time for families to receive these supports: two years.

If this government was truly intent to support children with disabilities and their families, they would increase the support for the backlog of FSCD, but we don't see that. This may even have an

ancillary support if we actually provided that funding to FSCD within the classrooms. We know that FSCD brings not only needed respite to families but support like speech-language pathologists, psychologists, or even behavioural specialists, that the minister says are needed for complexity in classrooms.

Well, what about PUF funding? Mr. Speaker, it really does sound like this government may have an opportunity to support the needs of students that no standardized testing will do, but why aren't they? This is why this amendment is necessary, because this government has the answers before it on how to support kiddos with disabilities, but they choose not to. Bill 6 is unnecessary. The answers are there. This is just the government saying they are doing something, but they are, in fact, all smoke and mirrors. What is the solve? Funding. It's funding, not a bill to create unnecessary testing for our youngest learners. This bill needs to be struck, and this government needs to show up for our students, especially our students that have disabilities.

I've heard from educators who have told me that the current system is untenable, and providing strain on already overburdened educators will not solve the complexity in classrooms. The minister can collect the data, but where is the funding going to flow to address the problems that come out of this? Where is that data going to help this minister when the dollars don't flow? There's no way that they can notwithstand themselves out of this because the problem still remains that classrooms are complex, and this government does not want to fund the experts to address these complex needs and provide some alleviation on teachers. Look at that FSCD. Look at how they forced a contract onto teachers that did not deal with these complexities. They have the answers.

For a province as rich as Alberta no child, regardless of complexity or disability, should be made to feel as if they are a burden or a problem in their classroom. No child should undertake testing that has been proven to cause psychological stress. Some of my colleagues have spoken about this, about how the young ones break down with feelings of unworthiness when they undertake these tests. Why are we putting kiddos through this pain? Why does this government seem so bent on hurting Albertans? This is a pattern that is becoming increasingly worrisome.

Mr. Nicolaides: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Nicolaides: On 23(h), (i), and (j), the member just said: why is this government so intent on hurting Albertans? Of course, making insinuations and accusations that we're interested in hurting Albertans is language that is unnecessary to productive debate and is certainly language that will cause disorder in this Assembly. I know that you've ruled on matters very similar to this, Mr. Speaker, but that's why I rise for a point of order at this point.

8:40

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't think this is a point of order. He said that the member said: why is this government so intent on hurting Albertans? That is not implying specific intent on the part of the government. He did not say that the government's intent was to hurt Albertans, but the government is certainly intent on its actions. It's intent on its legislation, and in the member's opinion by taking those actions, the government is hurting Albertans. I would suggest this is a matter of debate.

The Speaker: Well, thank you, all, for all the contributions. In fact, the rules under (h), (i), and (j) say that you can't impute a motive onto somebody else. When you say "the government is intent on," it kind of suggests the government wants to. While we might think that we know what the other side is, the rules clearly say we can't speculate or say we know what the other side is. So it's clearly a point of order, and I'll ask you to apologize and withdraw.

Member Arcand-Paul: I apologize and withdraw.

Debate Continued

Member Arcand-Paul: I cannot in good conscience support this bill because it will affect disabled Albertans, and this amendment is absolutely necessary. I think about my constituent Tarra, who comes to me with tears in her eyes about how worried she is for younger disabled kids who are just getting into schools, who are excited to pick out their new shoes and outfits for their first day of class, and who are socializing with other kids, learning the important pro-social skills that only in-classroom learning can provide.

This government waxed on about the importance of getting kids in classrooms just last winter, but again, when we had those conversations, parents had to take this government to court because the court found that this government had discriminated against children with disabilities in classrooms. Mr. Speaker, this is a pattern. Instead of providing the support that educators have asked for and which this government is forcing them to accept in terms, again, as they put earlier tonight, of put up or shut up, this does not solve the things that Albertans are asking for, and it creates legislation in a regime that is entirely ableist, that discriminates against disabled Albertans.

When I go back to my constituent and tell her that the government is not focused on her priorities, that children with disabilities are, again, not respected by the government, I will be sure to send her the minister's regards that these standardized tests will somehow help because he says so. I'll be sure to talk to the parents in my riding who come to me asking for what we can do for their children with disabilities because this government will not. This bill needs this amendment, and the ministers need to go crunch their numbers and provide the support that will actually help children with disabilities and their families instead of putting forward legislation that is inherently ableist.

Look at the history of this Chamber, Mr. Speaker. Ableist legislation has been here before, in 1928 and 1937 until 1972. Let's not revert back to it. It is for these reasons that I support this amendment and this piece of legislation being struck.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Member Miyashiro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Far be it for me to say the government is purposely trying to harm people. I think it's obvious, though, that this government doesn't care. This government doesn't listen. This government doesn't really bother with the research that's out there, doesn't work with teachers in the public education system to make things right. You know what? I'm going to repeat a lot of things some of my colleagues have already said and some things that they haven't because, really, just repeating the same things isn't getting through to this government anyway.

Students and teachers really don't need legally binding standardized testing. They need smaller class sizes. They need meaningful supports. This government knows this, yet they continue to ignore teachers and the needs of the public school

system. Perhaps it's just that implementing these tests is truly just a distraction from the crisis in the educational system that this government has caused. If the UCP government cared at all about improving literacy and numeracy, they would have addressed the teachers' concerns during the strike and during the period leading up to the strike rather than stripping teachers of their constitutional rights.

These tests are challenging, stigmatizing, demoralizing for children with disabilities and learning challenges. However, to think that the department of education is going to consider this as something that needs to be dealt with: why would we think that when the department that actually deals with people with disabilities is not treating the people with disabilities fairly as well? There are better ways to support children's learning needs in the classroom, to empower kids to learn, rather than make them feel incompetent.

This government might also point to the government of Manitoba, whose Legislature just voted in favour for tests although they are just literacy only and they're only to be administered in grades 1 to 3. But the biggest distinction between what they're doing and what we're doing is that it's for reading only, and the emphasis is that these tests will be followed up with the resources for those that need it. Manitoba also has class-size caps and a higher per-student funding. Those things taken in consideration make it a little bit better package for testing.

We know that implementing the screening and testing and resources and supports are in place. It's completely different than forcing screening on teachers and kids who have no ability to access further supports after those challenges are identified. Those tests are not only administratively challenging for the teachers, but they can be demoralizing for the students, as we've heard earlier this evening, especially for students with disabilities, but there we go again thinking that this government will actually care about people with disabilities. We've heard reports that students had panic attacks and hit themselves while taking these tests. You know, Mr. Speaker, I've worked with autistic people in the past, and it takes a lot less than test taking to make them engage in self-harm.

Improving literacy and numeracy scores is not achieved through standardized testing. Again, it's achieved best through improved classroom conditions and support for teachers. How do we know this? Well, the ATA – far be it for me to, you know, quote teachers – did a big report of 1,500 teachers or so to talk about literacy and numeracy screeners and how they affect the elementary children. Three-quarters of the teachers surveyed are very concerned; 71 per cent said that they believe the mandatory literacy and numeracy screeners are developmentally inappropriate for the elementary students; 73 per cent of teachers report a negative impact on student emotional well-being, with high levels of anxiety due to the mandatory testing; and 75 per cent of the teachers say that repeating these tests throughout the year have no value at all.

Mr. Speaker, let's hear from some real experts, the ones that are actually in the classrooms, the ones that are dealing with complex needs and overcrowdedness. From a teacher in Lethbridge:

I am a literacy expert and run intervention from K-6 in my building. My school is actually working on a project with George Georgiou and let me tell you how you are all missing the mark. We do not need more screens. We have the screens and assessments. Teachers are already completing them. What you are missing is the support that comes after screens are done! For example, many teachers see children have been flagged as a literacy or numeracy concern – we know. What we need are more

interventionists to support children in literacy and numeracy. Whether these are teachers or EAs, the reality is we do not have the people to do this effectively. So when we talk about complexity, we do not require more screens to do this . . .

We have the data. Screens show us which students need support. We need assessments for teachers to determine next instructional steps, and we need the human resources to be able to do something about it.

8:50

From another teacher in Lethbridge:

Let me be clear – I absolutely support investments in early learning. But real improvement in literacy and numeracy doesn't come from more government-mandated testing. It comes from trusting teachers' professional expertise and ensuring schools actually have the resources to respond to students' needs. Alberta's children deserve meaningful support, not another layer of bureaucracy disguised as accountability.

Teachers don't need another test to tell us which children need help. We already know. What we don't have are the supports – educational assistants, manageable class sizes, and timely access to interventions – that allow us to provide that help effectively.

The ministry of Education collected teacher feedback on the use of literacy and numeracy screeners, yet those results remain hidden. Meanwhile, independent research conducted this year confirms what teachers have been saying all along: these tests create unnecessary stress for students and provide little to no value for actual learning. Without proper follow-up support, these screeners are nothing more than paperwork for the sake of politics.

Turning existing policy into legislation doesn't improve outcomes – it just distracts from the real issues. Large class sizes, chronic underfunding, and insufficient supports continue to undermine Alberta's classrooms. I can't help but wonder why your government would prioritize appearances over action at a time when students and teachers are stretched to the limit.

Please start listening to the people who work with children every single day. Teachers' professional judgment remains the most accurate and compassionate way to understand a child's learning needs – no standardized test will ever replace that.

The last e-mail, Mr. Speaker, is from a grade 1 teacher describing her usual day.

During our phonics lesson we continued focusing on mastering just four letter sounds – because many of my first graders still do not know them. (This is certainly partly due to the fact that a significant portion of our time together in September was spent administering the UCP government's ridiculous and inappropriate literacy and numeracy assessments rather than spent on learning letter sounds.) At the same time, I have several students who can already read fluently but who are six-year-olds who struggle with regulation and attention. They need and deserve challenge and enrichment, but they cannot work independently, and there is no additional staff to provide support or extension. The reality is that while I'm teaching some students the basics of letter-sound correspondence, others are capable of reading paragraphs. And yet, they all sit in the same room, waiting for me to divide myself nineteen ways.

Mr. Speaker, I'll finish by saying that this ideologically driven, unscientific-driven, bureaucracy-driven numeracy and literacy testing of students does not have the endorsement of the people that have to do it. It's putting more burden on school districts, and it's actually harming the well-being of many children in the school system. I will vote against this bill.

[Motion on amendment RA1 lost]

The Speaker: Back to the main motion. On the main motion for the – make sure I get the right reading – second reading of Bill 6, does the mover want to close?

Mr. Schow: Do I have a chance to speak?

The Speaker: No, you missed the boat there. They're on the closing here.

Minister, would you like to close?

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to close debate on second reading of Bill 6. In doing so, I want to ground the discussion not in the noise of political disagreement but in the quiet and undeniable truth of education, science, and human rights. The opposition during debate has repeatedly attempted to use political rhetoric to override the empirical evidence and the undisputed science of reading and mathematics. This stance is not merely a politicized agreement; it is, regrettably, a refusal to acknowledge established academic consensus and a defence of a system that has chronically failed our children.

The debate we are having now is not hypothetical, Mr. Speaker. It is about a system that has operated under a wait-and-fail model for far too long. We have, in effect, waited for a child to fall so far behind that their academic and emotional distress becomes visible. This delay is an ethical failure. It is a slow, grinding process of academic disenfranchisement.

Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker. This bill is about equity. It is about dismantling the systemic barriers that prevent children with learning disabilities from achieving their full potential. It is about ensuring that we do not fail the thousands of children across Alberta who are struggling in science. It is a moral imperative informed by the highest academic standards.

The single most powerful argument for Bill 6 is simple, stark, and globally recognized, which is a vital tool for early diagnosis in both literacy and numeracy. The evidence is clear. As we move forward, we are joining a global movement led by decades of scientific research. Researchers from organizations like Dyslexia Canada confirm that universal early screening is necessary to protect the rights of all students, particularly those with specific learning disabilities. I wonder then why, Mr. Speaker, the NDP disagrees with Dyslexia Canada.

However, this is not merely a policy preference. It is a human rights issue explicitly stated in the findings of the Ontario Human Rights Commission's report, the Right to Read inquiry. This report called on the government of Ontario to mandate universal screening for all students from K to 2. I wonder why, Mr. Speaker, the NDP disagrees with the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

To continue the status quo of a wait-to-fail model which relies on teacher observation rather than proactive, data-based risk assessment is to actively endorse systemic failure. This legislation is our opportunity to move from a reactive, deficit-based system to a proactive evidence-based system.

The opposition has questioned the scientific foundation of this bill, yet the evidence is homegrown, peer-reviewed, and internationally validated. The scientific backbone of this legislation comes directly from our own province, from researchers who have spent decades combating reading difficulties. The screening tools and the associated intervention programs were designed and developed by a distinguished Albertan, Dr. George Georgiou. He is a professor of educational psychology at the University of Alberta and the director of the J.P. DAS Centre on Developmental and Learning Disabilities.

Dr. Georgiou's work is not merely local, it is internationally recognized. He has been inducted into the Royal Society of Canada,

the highest academic honour in our country, for his contributions to the field of educational psychology, and he has earned the Alberta Teachers' Association's educational research award in 2019.

The reason for his acclaim is the clear and measurable results of his work, which strictly adhere to the principle of structured literacy and the science of reading. His intervention program focuses on essential components, including phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. By meticulously targeting the core deficits associated with dyslexia, this Alberta-developed methodology has proven its superiority.

The evidence from his studies is the most compelling argument for this bill. Dr. Georgiou's study has demonstrated that his targeted programs could reduce the number of at-risk readers to as low as 1.4 per cent of the original cohort. This reduction is not marginal. It represents a nearly complete eradication of widespread reading risk through early intervention. This is the key, Mr. Speaker. His research is not theoretical; it produces results. Dr. Georgiou's intervention program, which Alberta education has made available to all school boards has helped thousands of Alberta students.

The data is overwhelming. In rigorous studies 80 per cent of struggling readers improve their reading level by a year and a half in just four and a half months of intervention. This transformation is achieved through targeted, evidence-based instruction, demonstrating the profound plasticity and responsiveness of the young mind. This is not just policy. This is, in fact, miraculous, life-changing science made here in Alberta.

To dismiss Bill 6 is to dismiss the proven efficacy of our own provincial academic leaders and researchers. Our approach is rooted in the academic consensus that effective screeners must align with the foundational skills of reading and numeracy. This is not a curriculum-based quiz, Mr. Speaker; this is a forensic, psychometrically sound diagnostic tool designed for early identification. The core strength of the high-quality screeners mandated by Bill 6 is their focus on specific, predictive, foundational deficits which are crucial for decoding the English language.

9:00

This approach moves past general observations and directly identifies the root causes of a student's reading difficulties. Phonological awareness is the overarching ability to recognize and manipulate the sound structure of spoken language independent of meaning. It's an auditory skill that exists before a child even sees a letter. This ability is repeatedly cited as one of the strongest predictors of later reading success.

The screeners target several levels within this hierarchy, including syllable awareness, rhyme awareness, which includes recognizing that words sound alike, onset rhyme awareness, and phonemic awareness. Research, including that supported by the National Reading Panel in the United States, confirms that deficits here, often termed the phonological core deficit, are the single most common cause of reading difficulty, including dyslexia. Studies like those by Torgesen have established that at least 80 per cent of all poor readers demonstrate a weakness in this area, in phonological awareness. Without strong phonological awareness a student is unable to move forward. They cannot successfully apply the logic of reading because they cannot consciously hear the sounds that letters are supposed to represent.

The second vital deficit targeted by the screeners is the alphabetic principle, an important foundational skill that is assessed through the letter name and sound, or LeNS, test. This is the understanding that written letters and letter patterns represent the sounds of spoken language. This principle is the bridge that links auditory awareness to written text. Screeners assess a child's early understanding of

letter-sound correspondence and their ability to quickly retrieve those associations.

The high-quality screeners in Bill 6 confirm whether a child has secured these foundational skills. Essentially, the screeners ask: (a) can the child hear the sounds in the words, and (b) can the child link those to their corresponding letters? When the answer to either question is no, the screener immediately flags them as high risk. This allows educators to begin intensive, evidence-based structured intervention immediately, preventing the struggle from becoming entrenched.

We are testing the prerequisites for reading, not simply a child's exposure to specific curriculum outcomes. Academic authorities, including the landmark National Reading Panel report, identified phonological awareness instructions, specifically phonemic awareness, as a core essential component of effective reading instruction. Studies have consistently demonstrated that interventions targeting this specific area delivered early are overwhelmingly successful.

Equally critical, Bill 6 mandates screening for foundation numeracy skills. This commitment to early math identification is also vitally important, recognizing that strong numeracy is just as important as literacy for students' long-term academic and economic success. Successive reviews have advocated for better assessment tools for early identification of students at risk of mathematical difficulties. This is crucial because difficulties in mathematics, like reading, are often rooted in a lack of fundamental number sense.

The government-provided numeracy screeners measure a child's developing mathematical knowledge in three areas: number knowledge, number relations, and number operations. Furthermore, failure to acquire the four key early numeracy skills – oral counting, numeral identification, quantity discrimination, and missing number – may result in difficulty acquiring more advanced skills as they are precursors to understanding formal mathematics. By legislating these screeners, we are ensuring that we catch the early emergence of mathematical learning difficulties, also known as dyscalculia, which affect an estimated 5 to 14 per cent of children. For example, children who remained in the lowest 10th percentile in mathematics in kindergarten often score two standard deviation units below their peers five years later, illustrating the profound persistence of early gaps.

Improved math skills are associated with tangible life outcomes as well. Mr. Speaker, a large scale meta-analysis of 54 longitudinal studies, over 58,000 students, found that early numeracy measured before grade 1 significantly predicted later math performance. As well, the widely cited study *School Readiness and Later Achievement*, published in the journal of *Developmental Psychology* in 2007, another major study in the United States, found that early math skills at kindergarten entry were a strong predictor of success later through grade 5.

The goal of Bill 6 is to identify risk status and enable the appropriate allocation of resources to support effective intervention. The focus must be on foundational deficits. Universal screeners are designed to assess those highly reliable, research-backed predictors of reading disability regardless of the specific textbook or curriculum used. Delaying intervention, Mr. Speaker, until later grades creates an academic and emotional deficit that is almost impossible to overcome. By grade 4 reading shifts dramatically from learning to read to reading to learn. Students who begin older elementary grades lacking foundational skills face compounding academic challenges across all subjects and, of course, struggle with mental health and self-esteem challenges.

Mr. Speaker, we also cannot forget the profound human cost. These delays carry a severe emotional burden. Literacy difficulties

are well established to be associated with emotional and behavioural disorders. The constant failure, the public embarrassment of being unable to read at grade level, the struggle to complete homework, and the subsequent withdrawal from academic life can lead to anxiety, depression, and lifelong underachievement. We must act now.

Mr. Speaker, we are not an outlier, however, in Alberta. We are fulfilling a national consensus driven by human rights investigations and scientific evidence, yet the opposition is ignoring Dyslexia Canada, ignoring the Ontario Human Rights Commission, and ignoring researchers at the University of Alberta in favour of political rhetoric.

I also want to discuss very briefly the claim that the government is prioritizing testing over resources. Mr. Speaker, this is a classic straw man argument. Data and resources are interdependent but complementary. The testing is not the goal. The data from the testing is the indispensable tool for resource allocation. That is why we have invested \$40 million in Budget 2025 to support intervention work. Without the legally mandated data collection in Bill 6 the opposition's call for more resources would be nothing more than throwing money blindly at a vast, undefined problem. The data provides the map, the precision, and the accountability that ensures that the \$40 million is spent efficiently and effectively on the students who need it most.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Bill 6 is a foundational change rooted in the best available research on literacy and numeracy. We are choosing scientific efficacy over political convenience. We are choosing equity over the outdated and damaging wait-to-fail model. We are choosing the proven path that leads to reading success for all students. I urge all members to put aside the rhetoric, acknowledge the research from the Ontario Human Rights Commission and the global academic community, and vote to safeguard the future of Alberta's children.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Stephan: A-plus.

The Speaker: Order, hon. member.

The second reading of Bill 6, the Education (Prioritizing Literacy and Numeracy) Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2), has been moved.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:09 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Hunter	Pitt	Yao
Jean	Rowswell	Yaseen
Against the motion:		
Arcand-Paul	Haji	Miyashiro
Boparai	Irwin	Shepherd
Deol	Kasawski	Sweet
Eggen	Kayande	Tejada
Elmeligi	Metz	
Totals:	For – 45	Against – 14

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a second time]

Bill 10

Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2)

[Adjourned debate November 19: Member Eremenko]

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and speak to Bill 10, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2).

I would like to start off by saying that there are some good things in this bill that were approved and recommended by the members of the opposition, so I'm glad to see that the government has finally taken those recommendations and put them into action. It was a motion that my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Decore had put forward. It was voted in favour by members of the House, so it's good to see that the government took that and was able to put it into legislation, which shows that when both sides of the House are listening and working together . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Carry on, hon. member.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It shows that when both sides of the House listen and work together, we're able to actually achieve good things, and I appreciate that.

Now, in saying that, there are some other pieces of this bill which I would say we have some concerns with partly because the thing that's interesting about when the government first started doing red tape reduction legislation was that they introduced it as a way to do some quick housekeeping. It was supposed to be something where if some language needed to be changed in a piece of legislation, you would just change some of the sections. It would be like one page for this bill or a half a page for that bill.

What we've seen over the years, though, is that these bills continue to get bigger and bigger and bigger. There seem to be more and more and more mistakes that need to be corrected by pieces of legislation that have been quickly moved through this Chamber without a lot of consultation or adjustments.

Also now what we're starting to see is what should be considered, stand-alone pieces of legislation are now being put in as red tape reduction. These are pieces where it's actually, like, brand new legislation. It's not amending anything. It's not creating or adjusting pieces of legislation. It's actually creating new laws through new pieces of legislation that have never existed before.

I would say that that's not red tape reduction. I would say that that's this government's way of recognizing that instead of listening to what Albertans are saying they're going to try to sneak things in and hope that they're not going to get caught.

9:30

The reason I say this is specifically to the previous minister of agriculture, the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. I think he

would be very interested in this red tape reduction, and his colleagues that are sitting beside him, because of the fact that it introduces elk farms into Alberta. When the minister that is currently the minister of transportation was the minister of agriculture, he didn't want this to happen because he was being lobbied back in the day. I was his critic back then. I've been around a long time, a very long time.

At that time I remember the minister and I – the minister of transportation, then the minister of agriculture – going back and forth during estimates on this very topic. And the fact that, at that time, the minister was being lobbied by a certain group of individuals who were wanting these elk farms to be established, and the minister couldn't get it across the finish line. The reason for that is because at the very same time that that was happening, there was a large outbreak of CWD in the United States. CWD is highly contagious. When it gets into our . . .

Mr. Schow: What's CWD?

Ms Sweet: You know, what's really interesting is that the government keeps asking me questions. They have an opportunity at some point to stand up and speak, and they could, or they could just stop for a second and I'll tell them about all the great things.

The Speaker: And I will encourage the members on the other side to make it so that it's really easy for everyone in here to hear you, hon. Member.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Schow: What is CWD?

Ms Sweet: So the question that the member opposite asked me was: what is CWD? Chronic wasting disease. High-five. Thank you.

You know what? When the government actually heckles me and asks me a question, it tells me that I've hit a nerve about something that actually does really bother them, and they're listening to it because they know that what I'm saying is actually accurate. In 2021 the reason that we didn't create elk farms, or cervid hunting preserves for technology people on the other side, is because there was a big risk for chronic wasting disease to be spread across the province, which would then impact our domestic velvet farms and all of the other farms that we had across the province.

Saskatchewan still at that time also had these farms. Again, the decision was not to do this because in the United States one farm ended up having CWD, and they were taking their livestock and moving them to other farms like this, and they were spreading the disease to other farms. Where do we get our livestock from to bring them up for these farms? Our partner in the United States. So there was a big worry that if we did that, then we would end up spreading CWD into the population in Canada, into Alberta, and potentially B.C. and Saskatchewan.

Now, when I asked the current minister about these concerns, the response I received from the current minister was: "Well, don't worry. We won't bring up the elk from the United States because we recognize that CWD could be a concern. We'll get them from Saskatchewan." Well, where does Saskatchewan get them from? Let me guess: the United States. Oh, it's like a round circle. Shocking. So really not solving the problem.

The other fun fact is that Saskatchewan doesn't actually know that we were doing this, because I called them and asked. They had no idea we're talking about this. I called B.C. to be like: "Hey. Heads up. We're having this conversation in Alberta. Are you worried about your livestock population?" They had no idea. Great consultation, government. High-five on that, too. So if we're not

talking to our counterparts in our two neighbouring provinces, why are we hiding it? Why doesn't the government want people to know that they're trying to do this?

Mr. Nally: In the bill? We're hiding it in the bill.

Ms Sweet: And it is being hidden in the bill, because it should be a piece of legislation by itself. It should be stand-alone. The fact is that it's in red tape reduction and not a stand-alone piece of legislation when it is going to create new laws in this province. It's not amending anything. It's not creating anything that is, like, a language change. It is literally creating a whole new piece of law that will end up creating a whole new industry. If you're so proud of it, create a bill by itself and just do it and tell people you're doing it. Most of the industry didn't even know it was coming.

Then the minister's response to me around this as well, when I said: well, why are we doing it now? It didn't get done in 2021. The previous minister can – actually, two ministers. The current minister was a replacement of the Minister of Finance, and the Minister of Finance was a replacement of now the minister of transportation, so three ministers haven't been able to do it for a very good reason: a lot of people don't want it. The answer I got from the minister around, "Well, why would we do this?" is that we have to save the elk industry. Like who? Who are we trying to save? What part of the industry are we trying to save? How many people is that? Why all of a sudden is it an issue? Like, whose companies are we trying to save?

When I talk to the outfitters and the people who are actually part of, you know, our hunting industry currently – the minister of forestry I think would probably have thoughts around this – they're not big fans of these. They don't need them. So who are the individuals that are going to benefit from this new piece of legislation? It would be nice to know that piece.

The other piece that I think is also very important is that we clearly don't want to learn from histories. We have a chronic problem in this province around wild boars because at some point somebody thought it was a great idea to create boars and put them in farms and let's see if we could farm the boars. Now we've got them running around wild in the north, digging up things, wrecking crops, making issues for farmers, problems for forestry industry. Now the conversation is: well, we have to create programs to get ears, and we'll try to encourage people to hunt boars, and we'll give them money back if they can produce an ear. The province is now paying people to harvest wild boars because at one point we wanted to create farms. Then they got out, and they ran away, and now we have problems. They're like bunnies, and they multiply. They multiply a lot.

An Hon. Member: Different animals

Ms Sweet: They are different animals.

The problem is that you have penned animals and you think you can secure them, and then they get out. Then all of a sudden diseases spread. All of a sudden we have domestic animals out in the wild creating a lot of issues for our other animals, so it's not a good idea. I think the minister should be explaining to everybody why all of a sudden this has become the thing that we should be doing. That's one part of the bill.

There are other issues here, too, that I really, really have a big problem with, and that goes back to the citizenship markers. I do not understand why this government persistently continues to feel like identity politics is the solution to their governing problem. That's what they're doing. Every single piece of legislation that we have seen introduced into this Chamber is about identity politics, going after teachers, going after unions. Let's take away their rights.

That's a hundred per cent targeting a group of individuals, because workers' rights are not the priority. The government doesn't like unions, so let's go after the unions. Let's go after the teachers. A hundred per cent identity politics.

Now we see this government having pieces of legislation that are introduced that are going to impact parents' abilities to access health care on behalf of their children because they don't happen to agree with trans communities: totally identity politics.

Now we see in this piece of legislation citizen markers on identification for people who the government has deemed are not Canadian or Albertan citizens: not good enough to live here, not good enough to be able to receive benefits. We're going to put markers on their ID so that they have to justify whether or not they have access to health care. We heard the Premier in question period a couple of weeks ago – last week, I think – say that Albertans should come first and then people with markers come second. What is that?

An Hon. Member: Benefits of citizenship.

Ms Sweet: Benefits of citizenship. Clearly the government just said that. Benefits of citizenship. Thank you for validating identity politics.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear.

Ms Sweet: Every single piece of legislation that this government has introduced – and they're "hear, hearing" me. Like, they don't get it. Identity politics is not okay, my friends. I don't think this should be, like, a revolutionary idea. It is not good, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Through the chair, please.

Ms Sweet: It is not okay to use legislation to continuously target different groups. All we've done in this House is continuously have pieces of legislation that target different groups. We don't talk about the economy in here. We don't talk about legislation that could help benefit, like, job growth or look at tax benefits or grant programs. Like, I haven't seen a piece of legislation in here that has anything to do with increasing wages. We tried that last week.

9:40

The government, though, as of today, will be giving all of their parliamentary secretaries, if the bill passes, wage increases. That seems to work for the government. If it's good for them, it's good for them, but for the rest of Alberta: I'm sorry; you have to wait in line, and also we need to check your ID just to make sure, see if you're allowed to come in.

It doesn't need to be done. It's just a way to create a conversation that speaks to a group of individuals that, for some reason, this party has decided are the people they need to speak to at the expense of everybody else. I don't understand how we got here. I know I've stood up in this House numerous times over the last few weeks saying the exact same thing. I don't know how we've got here. How has the government lost the direction of where we came from as Albertans?

We used to be inclusive of people that came here. We invited them in. They were innovators and job creators. We celebrated that fact, and we were proud of it. We were proud to be the province that invited people here, welcomed them in, and said: "Sit down at our dinner table. We want to share with you."

This doesn't share. This says: I'm going to put a label on your ID, and you have to prove that you're Albertan or Canadian. That's not: "Welcome to my table. Please share with me and eat with me, and let's share stories, and let's build this province together." That's

a dialogue of: I was here first, and you now come second, and if I don't have enough money to provide your health care, you're going to have to wait. That's what we're hearing from this bill, and that's what we're hearing from this government, even in the health care bills that have come in this week, too. It's all about: if you can pay, you're welcome; if you can't, you wait. It is a loss to the values of who we are as Albertans. This isn't even progressive conservative value . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak briefly on the red tape reduction bill. I think it's a great opportunity to get a couple of things on the record, in particular a quick reminder to the members opposite why they are the members opposite and in opposition.

Mr. Eggen: Because we won.

Mr. Schow: It's interesting because one of the members opposite just said: because we won. Mr. Speaker, they did not win. If you did not win, then you lost, which makes you a loser, or you lost, right? That's not a personal comment; it's more just the reality of the situation in this Chamber, but I digress.

This is a great opportunity for me to stand and talk a little bit about the red tape reduction bill. I do want to take a moment before I start to applaud the Member for Edmonton-West Yellowhead . . .

Ms Sweet: I am wearing a lot of yellow today.

Mr. Schow: Solid. They call that a co-ordination, and I like that, but, Mr. Speaker, that member talking about elk farms would be the only member in the opposition benches with any cred in rural Alberta, any cred. I hear people piping up and talking about, you know, representing rural Alberta. Forget about it. On this side of the House we know who's from rural Alberta, who understands rural Alberta, and I can tell you that none of the members on the opposite save for that member who just spoke understand rural Alberta.

I'm happy to invite all the members opposite to hop on a bus and we can go take that rural Alberta tour and show them part of the heartbeat of Alberta: the small businesses, the mom-and-pop shops, the farms, the family farms that help support this province. That's what the red tape reduction bill is about, Mr. Speaker. It's about removing barriers so that we as a province can be more productive, more prosperous, be the Alberta that everybody in Canada knows us to be.

Now, the Member for Edmonton-Yellowhead said that. . .

Ms Sweet: Manning.

Mr. Schow: Manning. I get it. I thought you corrected me in the right way. Okay. I apologize. You know, I'm going to get my sheet out here, because I'm going to make some references to members and their constituencies here.

Well, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, I've visited and lived in many of the cities around this country, but I am proud to call Alberta home. I'm proud to call Cardston home. It's a beautiful small town right north of the U.S. border, with some of the most amazing people that you'll ever meet, and I encourage all the members opposite to come and visit.

What I would say is that the member said: "How did we get here? How did we get here in this position?" I can tell you how we got here. After four years of what I would call the triple-black-swan event in Alberta politics, where we had the Leader of the Opposition in the mayor's seat in Calgary, we had Rachel Notley as the Premier

in Alberta, and we had Justin Trudeau, Rachel Notley's boss, in Ottawa. And those four years were some of the darkest times in this province because they drove people out of Alberta. They literally told Albertans to leave the province and find a job elsewhere. What kind of government would ever do that? That's how we got here, Mr. Speaker. That is how we got here.

I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to red tape reduction, it is important to keep in mind the people. The people of Alberta, the ones on the ground, the ones that we serve, the ones that elected us, and the ones that hold us accountable: what they want is a government that's responding to the needs of them that develop and emerge every single day, one of which is access to services. That is exactly why we put a citizenship on the front of the driver's licence, why we're putting the health care in the back. No longer do you have to try to keep track of that paper card, stuff it in your wallet; it bends, maybe it rips, and you've got to order a new one. We're moving past that. It's a new day in Alberta.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that people may not think that's a significant move, but people have been asking me for that. Heck, I've been asking for that for so long myself, long before I got elected and occupied any seat in this hallowed Chamber.

But, Mr. Speaker, how did we get here? You know, I'm reminded of a story . . . [interjection] I barely got here; the weather was suspect . . . years ago when I lived in England. I was visiting the city of London, and I was in a restaurant, and I was having a hamburger, just by myself. I thought, you know what? I'm going to get a really good hamburger and some chips, which is what the English call french fries. I had the bottle of ketchup, but it was one of the glass bottles, and I tipped that thing over trying to get the ketchup out, and it wasn't coming out. I know that every single member in this Chamber knows what I'm talking about. You've been there, the ketchup doesn't want to come out of the bottle.

So I started hammering on the bottom. For a solid minute I was trying to get the ketchup out until I noticed a mother and her young child several tables over looking at me and just howling, just laughing at me, wondering: "What is this guy doing? He's sitting there, he's trying to get the ketchup out of the bottle. He's sitting there for a minute, not realizing that doing the same thing over and over expecting a different result really is the definition of insanity." They looked at me and they thought: what is this guy doing? I think about that story, Mr. Speaker, and me at the time not realizing that I was being very silly because I wasn't changing up what I was doing, trying to get that ketchup out. And the NDP are so similar to that situation because they keep talking about the same issues over and over, and it's the same issues that drove Albertans right out of this province, out to B.C.

Now, speaking of B.C., the Member for Edmonton-Manning talked about calling British Columbia, and I'm interested to know what else they discussed. I would love to know if that member discussed, potentially, market access for energy products, maybe a pipeline going west. It seems to be the talk of the town right now, Mr. Speaker. It has been for a long time. And I hear . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I think we're having a little bit of fun, but let's make sure we can hear the person that we're supposed to hear. Let's keep the volume of the fun down low enough that we can hear the one with the floor, please.

Mr. Schow: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Now we are past the ketchup story. I know the member was absolutely enthralled by that story, and I appreciate that because I think it's important sometimes to bring some personal anecdotes into our speeches. It really drives home

the message. Quite relatable. [interjection] Now I remember; I asked for a new bottle, a plastic one that I could squeeze.

Mr. Speaker, I do know that the Member for Lethbridge-West seems to have a lot to say and a lot to heckle, particularly in question period. I've actually never heard a member scream as loud as that member has in question period, but I digress again.

Again, how did we get here? How did we get here? The answer is the United Conservative Party, under the leadership of then Jason Kenney, and now under the leadership of the current Premier, have responded to the calls from Alberta to get our province back on track. And because of that work, unlike the NDP who received horrific grades by the CFIB on red tape reduction, we have received consecutive A grades for our red tape reduction efforts. For consecutive years we've received these A grades, Mr. Speaker. Why? Because we're being responsive, we're listening, and that's what's most important about what we do.

9:50

Now, I should also respond to what the Member for Edmonton-Manning said about why we do the red tape reduction bills. This has always been about removing barriers. If you're talking about small language changes and little fixes or updating bills, that's a miscellaneous statutes amendment act. I've introduced many of them; riveting stuff, Mr. Speaker. But the red tape reduction bill is important. It was a ministry that we campaigned on back in 2019, made very clear how interested we were in removing these barriers to success. So, again, that's how we got here.

The members opposite are over there because they didn't get it. They had their opportunity the first time, the first ever one-term government in the province of Alberta.

Now, they talk about identity politics, and I want to address this because Alberta has always been and will always be an inclusive place to live and to work and to visit, and we will remain that, Mr. Speaker. But I can tell you that as a result of the poor management of the immigration system by the federal government for the last 10 years, we are on a trajectory of unsustainable growth. Last year alone Alberta saw a growth rate of 4.4 per cent. For context, only developing nations around the world had anything over 3 per cent. We're at 4.4 per cent. The only other nation higher than that was South Sudan. That is an unsustainable level of growth.

The real problem – the real problem, Mr. Speaker – is that while the federal government is supposed to consult the provinces and take their feedback into consideration, they don't, and they have final say as to who comes into Canada. But it's on the provinces to deliver social services like health care, like education, building roads. It's our responsibility and it's on Alberta taxpayers to fund that. The reality is that before the government can give any money or distribute any money for anything, they must first take money through taxes. I want to remind members that before the government can give, it must first take, and there is only one taxpayer. I feel that the members opposite, another reason why they're over there, have forgotten that, forgotten a key principle that there is only one taxpayer, and before we can give, before we can distribute money, we must first take it through taxes.

So, Mr. Speaker, as a province we have a responsibility to deliver social services, and I think we do it very well. There's no question we have challenges, but the purpose of the red tape reduction bill, a piece of it that's from my side, is to remove the requirement for Canadian work experience. The reason why this is important is because sometimes the workforce that we need right now isn't here in Alberta, and it takes time to train people, particularly in specific fields of high demand, so we have to go beyond our borders to find workers. That's why we talked a lot, and I will continue to talk a

lot, about economic migration, migration that's focused on building Alberta's economy.

Now, we've asked the federal government to reach a level of 65 per cent of economic migration, the rest in different streams. We're not there, and we're going to continue to press the federal government because it's so important that Albertans have the workforce they need, the skill sets they need to develop their opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, my time, I know, is running short, and I think I've made my point relatively clear as to why the members opposite are where they are and where we are, but I can assure Albertans tonight, and I will assure Albertans throughout the rest of this session and so long as I remain a member in this Chamber, that the government has their best interests in mind, whether it's building schools, building hospitals, cutting red tape, attracting investment, developing a workforce that is ready to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

Now, the members opposite are the ones who are guilty of engaging in identity politics. They are masters of it; a true masterclass in identity politics. You hear it every day in question period, and it's also screamed by some members even when it's not their turn to speak.

But I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that on this side of the House at no time will we shirk our responsibility as legislators and as representatives of our constituencies, but also as the government, to do what's in the best interests of the province. That is why this bill, Bill 10, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2), is tabled, to address the ever-emerging issues that we care, Albertans care, our constituents care most about, to make their lives easier, attract investment, and develop and keep Alberta as the best place to live, to play, and to visit.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to speak to Bill 10. It really is what I would call a contaminated bill. Not only have we heard from my colleague from Edmonton-Manning about concerns about contamination with prion disease in the elk, but we're also seeing contamination within this bill of things that really are not reducing red tape at all.

I'm going to start by talking about the idea of putting the Alberta health care number on driver's licences. One of the things that we know is very important in our society today is privacy, that more and more people are getting their identity stolen. It's very important that people be very careful about who they share their personal information with, and putting yet another personal identifier onto our driver's licences, which are used for many more things than just access to the health care system, is going to put people at increased risk of identity theft.

There are things that are really important to pay particular attention to when we're thinking about sharing information. One of them would be our social security number, our credit card information, any financial information, and all other kinds of sensitive data that we don't want to be putting out there except for the exact use that it's necessary for.

There are seven golden rules of sharing information, and the first one is: is it necessary? There doesn't seem to be any reason whatsoever for putting the Alberta health care number on the driver's licence. Another one is: is the risk proportionate? By sharing this information are you really getting something of value? I can't see any value by having a health care number on a driver's

licence. Is it relevant? No. The same reasons you would use your driver's licence are not the same reasons that you would need to use your Alberta health care card.

Are you giving enough adequate information? Well, again, why would we need Alberta health care number on our driver's licence? You want to ask if it's accurate. Well, that's pretty easy to do by being on the driver's licence, but there's not really any purpose for it. Another piece is: if you're sharing information, is it timely? The Alberta health care number is not going to change over a person's life. Why do we need to keep putting it onto a document that we have to repeatedly renew? This doesn't make any sense.

What are we going to be doing about the numbers of children? They're not going to have a driver's licence or a card. Who's going to keep the health care numbers for children, one parent or the other parent? At one point in time children were on the passports often of the mothers, and we've learned to get away from that because it meant that a child couldn't then travel outside the country with their other parent because their passport needed to be in the hands of the mother, so the young child couldn't go. That system has been ending.

10:00

We're still going to have a piece of information that, first off, is optional. Just getting it on there is a piece of red tape. I can't see how this reduces red tape in any way. But it adds a security risk to the individual when they're sharing their driver's licence that they're also going to be sharing another piece of information.

When we're trying to teach people to be informed about what information they should share, there are a number of guiding documents from the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada, and the first thing on that list is to think twice. Whether it's online or in person, you're constantly being asked for your personal data. The individual should ask why the information is needed and who will use it and how. So why would we need to have this piece of information shared on a driver's licence? There's no reason.

Once the information is out there, once someone has your health care number, it's going to be very difficult to control what happens to it. Every time a person applies for a job, they're going to need to provide ID. The ID is often the driver's licence, and that information is going to be there. It may well be that the health care number might be needed to support benefits after they're employed, but everyone who applies should not need to be providing their health care number. We don't want the health care number to be attached with the image that is on our driver's licence because that further adds the risk of that piece of information being out there.

We also need people to be able to speak up, and I see nothing in this process that is going to help inform people before they're asked to put their health care number on their driver's licence. We're trying to train people to say "no" about sharing their information. Well, if they need to share their driver's licence for one reason, they don't necessarily need to share their health care number.

This is a piece of information that could be very much misused. The health care number in the wrong hands could be used as a second piece of ID or a second number that can be used for malicious reasons. It can also be used as part of identity theft. It can also be used by someone trying to prove to someone they're phoning that they have a legitimate reason to be asking them for yet other identifying information such as banking information.

It's important that people are protected, and it's important that our government is not leading to the further leak of people's personal information. We're certainly asking that people don't discard or get rid of any documents that have this information on without formally shredding them.

I also want to talk a little bit about the cost of fraud when people's information is stolen, when there is an identity theft, which will be made easier by having more pieces of information on the same document. Victims of fraud and cybercrime in Canada lost more than \$638 million in 2024. That was an increase from the previous year, where there was \$578 million according to the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre. Putting the health care number on a driver's licence is not going to reduce red tape, and it's certainly not giving a message that we should be protecting our information.

Fraudsters disguise themselves by creating false identities to manipulate, deceive, and steal victims' information, and it is detrimental to that individual in many, many ways financially but also personally. People can be devastated. And who has time to deal with changing all of their information over again? Whatever the cause, fraud has so many different effects on every individual, so we need to think very, very carefully about why a health care number would be added to a driver's licence. I cannot see, or I have not heard – although I'm very happy to hear from the members on the other side – what the value of this is to Albertans.

The highest number of victims from fraud and from identity fraud was in 2024, and the number is going up. The impact on victims is very deep and comes from increasingly sophisticated scams. We've all heard of the grandmother scam, where the elderly are contacted by fraudsters pretending to be their grandchild particularly. Now, in those scams, as they're becoming more common, more people are starting to ask a few questions to try to identify whether the person on the other end of the line really indeed should be contacting them and if they're really doing it on behalf of their grandchild. The more information that they have access to, the easier it is for the fraudster to pretend they are someone else and to take money away from those individuals.

It's also an issue that people lose their ID, and that happens all of the time. You might lose your driver's licence, but if you're going to now be losing your Alberta health care number along with, of course, your address, this just adds to the ability for fraud to take place.

Another thing along this line that I think is very important is that we have to think about how we're going to get actual legal, informed consent from people to collect this information and how consent is going to be obtained from individuals to hold this information once they get access to a person's driver's licence. Canadian privacy and data-protection laws are consent based. For the private non-health sector express or implied consent is always required before collecting, using, or disclosing personal information, and there are other limitations across different jurisdictions.

Many organizations are aware that they need to obtain consent to even collect any Canadian personal information, but many of these organizations and perhaps the registries that renew driver's licences may not be aware of all of the rules and regulations that must be followed in order to also collect the personal health information. Consent is only valid if it's reasonable to expect that an individual received information about the nature, purpose, and consequences of the collection and how it is going to be used or disclosed. As we haven't yet heard any good reason why this is going to be collected, to be added to a driver's licence, I don't see how anyone adding it and working in these registries would be able to collect this information.

The Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada has interpreted this requirement to mean that organizations cannot rely on a buried line in privacy policy or in terms of use and that the key elements must be brought specifically to the attention of the individual, including that they are collecting that specific information, meaning the health care number. They have to say with

whom that information is going to be shared and all of the purposes for why that information is being shared as well as discuss the risks of harm and other consequences that this will bring. This adds red tape; this does not reduce red tape.

10:10

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Acadia. Calgary-Klein. Sorry.

Member Tejada: I always get mixed up with Calgary-Acadia.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I rise in opposition to Bill 10, the so-called red tape reduction act. As we've already seen from various previous red tape reduction acts, this bill is presented at best as neutral administrative work and a cleanup of processes or sold as something that will supposedly make our lives easier with very little substance or evidence and sometimes questionable justifications for why they are taking a specific decision in a red tape reduction bill. In the pattern of UCP bills that have been passed in the last few weeks, it's not anything that anyone asked for, several parts of this bill. Some are, so it's not all bad. It's not all bad. I'll start with that. I'll start with the good that I can find in Bill 10, and that is around removing the Canadian work experience requirements under the Fair Registration Practices Act.

Since taking on the role of immigration and multiculturalism shadow minister I've been very fortunate to connect with multiple community members, community leaders, and all of the organizations that are doing the good work of serving our immigrant communities and helping them with integration. One of the resounding themes that I've heard from folks is that while it's exceptionally difficult, actually, to meet all of the requirements, especially around the point system – and that includes having the sufficient levels of education, having the sufficient levels of work experience in order to come to Canada – at the same time those requirements that they have spent so much time and effort proving when they come to Canada don't actually translate into getting the opportunities for work, especially work that's meaningful to their experience. That's a lot of skilled people who come here with great educations, great work experience, especially in some of those key areas that we're looking for, like health care, and aren't able to find work.

I know that we sometimes do this, Mr. Speaker. I'll just share a little bit of a personal perspective here. My mother was an accountant in her home country, and when she came to Canada, there wasn't really any pathway for her to find work that was meaningful, that was related to the work that she used to do, even though she was really good at it, very detail oriented. Instead, she did a little bit of volunteer work in the community, helping people do things like file taxes, and they all trusted her to do that work. Those jobs were not available to her partially because her credentials weren't recognized here but also the language proficiency at the time for her was a challenge.

A lot of folks have challenges now also working through that requirement – right? – and trying to get the language help. I know that sometimes we'll take shots at the side opposite, but I'll admit that federal programs have actually been cut when it comes to language acquisition, and that's made things a lot more difficult for people especially when they're trying to find work and they need to meet a certain proficiency in English language.

In my time in this role I've spoken to doctors, neurosurgeons, respiratory specialists, even cardiac specialists who face that frustrating prospect of not having any meaningful pathway to gaining employment here that's even tangential to their field of expertise. One of the barriers mentioned is the requirement of Canadian work experience often. Mr. Speaker, I think it's such a

travesty to have folks who are motivated, incredibly brilliant, and willing to do this work, excited to do the work here and have so much to contribute especially in all of those areas where we do have shortages, and to not have them working to their full potential and contributing to our communities in a way that's both meaningful for them but also a huge benefit to us as a society. I always come back to that, that it's not so much about just identity politics. It's about how we live together, how we work together, how we build the best communities together. So many of those folks are here to do exactly that.

Credit where it's due: the part of this bill that was actually born of the motion proposed in spring of 2024 by my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Decore. That has been brought back. It would be lovely to see more of that in the future. I would say: let's extend that to the many other great ideas we propose on this side of the House. Instead of rejecting motions or bills for partisan reasons, take some time to review the legislation or the motion before you and consider the information there on its merit and in good faith. Aside from all that, I'm glad that you've decided to take on this idea brought forward by my colleague from Edmonton-Decore. It's great to think that perhaps there's the possibility of us working collaboratively. You know, it would have been nice to see that work done even a few years ago when it was first proposed because it really would have materially changed the lives of so many new Canadians in positive ways and had many benefits for us.

Alberta's New Democrats will always support internationally trained immigrants in building better lives in their new home province. We know that these folks are a benefit to our communities and that their success is really our collective success. As legislators we can heed the call of so many folks that we've spoken to and ensure that we remove barriers by removing the Canadian work experience as a requirement. We can address one of the biggest hurdles faced right now by new Albertans and hopefully address the underemployment that they are experiencing. We can maybe even streamline the process by which professionals can have their credentials recognized and have them working in their fields.

The additional clauses around time limits for such approvals have also been something that's been brought up to me that is a pain point, just how long it takes to get credentials recognized and to get working in their fields. Again, I support this part of the legislation, and I wish I could say that more often in this place. We introduced Motion 511, and I can say that that's a net positive. You know, that really brings me to this saying that every dark cloud has a silver lining. That was the silver lining.

While on one hand this government is, you know, bringing back our great ideas when it comes to fair registration practices, unfortunately, they tie it in this bill to some very problematic anti-immigrant sentiments that have been sort of bred over time and leading the charge on some seemingly Trumpian talking points that I think stand to harm not only new Canadians but permanent residents and folks that are second- and third-generation Canadians, right? Just this question of: who's a citizen? Who deserves to be here?

I do think that this will end up causing harm, especially to a lot of racialized Albertans just going about daily life, and that is the citizenship marker. Changes to the Government Organization Act will allow for the displaying of citizenship markers on licences. We're now at the point of the red tape reduction bills that I've seen already come through this House where they become a bit of a Trojan Horse. You think it's going to be about some simple housekeeping and cutting red tape, but it actually proposes harmful suggestions like we saw already with the stopping of reporting on the deaths of kids in care after age 22 in the last iteration of the red tape reduction bills.

In the last few minutes I talked a bit about the recognition of work experience outside of Canada, and it brings to mind the fact that new Canadians experienced the highest rates of unemployment and underemployment, and I would say that that is especially so for youth. You know, I heard some members opposite talk about the conversations that they have with immigrant communities and that includes rural, urban. I really would hope to see more of that. We recognize that part of the barriers that they face are that lack of recognition of their work experience and education from abroad, but through many of the conversations that I've had with immigrant-serving organizations and the folks in my constituency – that's everyone from service workers to professionals in immigrant communities – they've also identified that one of the barriers is bias.

10:20

The conversations around immigration, who does and doesn't deserve to work here, to access services, have become especially strident. There are people who really inflame the arguments, and what I always come back to is: who are my neighbours? You know, new Canadians are our neighbours, and I'm really sad to see that we're at a point in Canadian politics where it's not about that. It's about: why don't I have access to the services that I should have?

I find that it's precisely when the majority of folks who are already underserved are feeling all of that pain from the things that they're not able to access that sometimes governments will take advantage of those pain points instead of addressing the areas that they haven't done any work on, like investing in public health care, investing in public education and other public services, investing in housing, and actually building affordable housing. In an affordability crisis they really create the conditions where folks will start to try to look for who to lay blame with for the situation that they're in. There's another phrase that I've heard: whenever you point fingers, there are three pointing back at you. In this case pointing of the finger at immigrant populations for shortages in services – the three services I think of: health care, education, all public services – really points back at the UCP for lack of investment.

I will say this on the citizenship markers. I've heard justifications from the other side that this is a way to bolster the security of elections, and now this has been thoroughly debunked. What we know is that the cases of voter fraud since 2013 have been a total of seven. So if we're talking about putting the citizenship marker on ID as a reason to bolster elections, we know that that's not actually a real problem.

Now, where I'm really concerned – and I know I did hear the minister of red tape reduction talk about how there's no discrimination in Alberta and that the idea that we would suggest that discrimination is possible by putting citizenship markers on IDs is somehow us engaging in identity politics. What we know, Mr. Speaker, is that several organizations have let us know that hate crimes are on the rise. We know that people are getting verbally harassed, sometimes physically harmed, and that a lot of that centres around this anti-immigrant sentiment.

Now, we know that other than voting there are no programs that are exclusively for Canadian citizens, so one of my concerns with putting on a citizenship marker is that there's a lot of nuance here. There are a lot of people who are here who might not necessarily be citizens who still have the right to access a lot of our public services. My concern with this is that this is a precursor. You know, I always say that some of those UCP AGMs are the way that the UCP tells on themselves. Putting this citizenship marker on ID: I'm concerned that this is going to be a precursor to illegally and

unconstitutionally restricting programs from people who are legal residents.

Now, I think that sends the message that it's okay to discriminate, and although I love the idea that there are people in this province that think that discrimination does not exist, I would say: talk to a few more of your constituents, and you will hear a different story. It's actually quite common and increasingly on the rise, and it's very concerning.

When we're talking about putting citizenship markers on our IDs, that opens the door to discrimination. Perhaps it's not a discriminatory move, but it is certainly opening the door to discrimination, and that's what we are thoroughly concerned with. I would also say that the cost down the line of denying services – you know, like, as much as people might enjoy the idea of these punitive measures, it won't actually materially improve conditions for Albertans that are here. Focus on affordability, health care, and education.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others? The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak on Bill 10, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2). I actually like the idea of bringing forward a red tape reduction bill that just jams all sorts of stuff into there. It's a lesson I hope to learn when I'm on the other side, after the next election. Every bill should be called red tape reduction statutes amendment act. Why not? Every bill is a red tape reduction act. Who could argue with that? Every second bill should be an inflation reduction act as well. I think that is actually the way forward here. This is clearly why the government has so many red tape reduction acts that don't actually reduce red tape.

This is an act that allows hunting on elk farms. My God, hunting on elk farms. [interjections] My goodness. Lots of cheers on the other side for hunting on elk farms. I don't know a single hunter who would be proud . . .

Mr. Hunter: Right here.

Member Kayande: . . . of bagging an elk on an elk farm. Oh, the Member for Taber-Warner is really fired up about that. He wants to walk into a fenced pen, shoot an elk, and take it home. I have limited time, so I'm not going to go into that.

The citizenship marker. The purpose of the citizenship marker is to suppress the wages of permanent residents. That's what this government is not talking about. It is about suppressing the wages of permanent residents and reducing the ability of permanent residents to get jobs. That's what this is about. It's about making sure that permanent residents can be easily distinguished from citizens so that employers know that somebody is in a lower bargaining position when they offer wages and when they offer employment. Now, who are these permanent residents that we're talking about? Permanent residents are our spouses, Mr. Speaker, the people we fell in love with.

I know the same story. I went to the United States, I went to school, and I fell in love. We lived together in the United States for a little while, and then we came here. We came here because at the time we had the world's best education system, and we had a health care system that would always take care of us. I made the argument to my wife – this was back in 2004 – that we can absolutely live in California, but our health care would always be at risk of our employment, and we would always have to overpay for a home in order to live in a good school district. That wasn't okay with me, so I came here. I was a citizen, and my blue-eyed blonde California wife was a permanent resident. Most people didn't think of us as

being that kind of couple when we said, “Oh, well, one of us was born from away, and the other was born here,” that I was the one who was born here.

I appreciate one of the members opposite who had a great deal to say about the fact that there is no discrimination in Alberta. I point out that that’s actually not been my experience. While his experience may have been different, it certainly hasn’t been mine.

10:30

Now, I don’t know how much more difficult the life of somebody I love would have been if a citizenship marker had been required on her driver’s licence, but I know that there are people in this city and in this province, in Calgary and in Calgary-Elbow, who are struggling, and their struggling will be made worse if they are permanent residents who don’t have a citizenship marker on their driver’s licence, because their wages, guaranteed, will be suppressed, and this government knows that. This government knows exactly why they’re doing this.

This is about a strategy for managing the base. Every single bill that this government has put forward in this session has been about managing their base. More testing, forcing teachers back to work is taking their constitutional rights away, taking away the constitutional rights of other Albertans to access medical treatment; these are all stops to a base. And this bill includes an inclusive

provision to make it easier for foreign-born professionals to practice, and so in order to mollify the base, that must be joined, necessarily, with an exclusive provision to suppress the wages and hurt the job opportunities of all other non-Canadian born people.

Permanent residency is usually a track. It’s not forever; it’s a path, but during that path this government has made the lives of those people worse if this bill gets passed. I really hope that the folks on the other side of the House take a real good look at who they’re hurting if they try and pass this bill.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Williams: With those insinuations, Mr. Speaker, I find it’s a good time for us to adjourn debate. I move that we adjourn debate until 1:30 p.m. on Wednesday, November 26 before the speeches on that side become any more obscene.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Acting Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Williams: Sorry. I move we adjourn the House. Thank you. Apologies, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:33 p.m.]

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