



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, November 26, 2025

Day 16

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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Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Brar, Gurtej Singh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
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Party standings:

United Conservative: 47

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 2

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Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 26, 2025

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, today we have the honour of welcoming back a man who has worn many hats: Wildrose chief of staff, interim leader of the United Conservative Party, and yes, even Speaker of this very House. He recently accepted a new role in Washington, DC, as the chief provincial trade representative for Alberta. Please join me in recognizing someone who needs no introduction, Mr. Nathan Matthew Cooper. [interjection] I don't usually get heckled on introductions.

Hon. members, we have a very, very special guest who has joined us in the Speaker's gallery. Please welcome the ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Canada, His Excellency Wang Di. His Excellency is accompanied by Consul General Liying Zhao, who is based in the consulate office in Calgary. Joining them are several other staff from the consulate in Calgary and the embassy in Ottawa. I would ask that they all please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Today we are honoured to welcome members of our custodial staff seated in the Speaker's gallery. These dedicated individuals work tirelessly every day behind the scenes to ensure that our spaces remain clean, safe, and welcoming for all of us and all of our visitors. Their commitment and professionalism are essential to the smooth functioning of this institution, and we deeply appreciate the pride that they all take in their work. I ask that they rise as I call their names: Julien deBruyn, Ardiana Hoti, Rhonda Sorochan, Benevic Gabasa, Nimfa Zoleta, Marcial Pepino, Maura Del Rosario, Steven Bourns, Cristina Bernas, Abebech Jara, Claudia Delgado, Nelcy Mendez, Michael Ramjug, and Laura Kalakalo. Please join me, members, in welcoming them and thanking them for their invaluable contribution. [Standing ovation]

We have school groups today. The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Overlooking the beautiful Whitemud freeway in Alberta's best constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar is STEM Collegiate. We have 153 guests from that school visiting us today. I ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you Pierrette and Barry Sharkey.

They're owner-operators of BPS Protective Services K-9. I ask them both to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Allow me to introduce to you and through you a couple of really good friends of mine, Ken Thomas and Dan Ukrainetz. These fine old gentlemen are with Bison Power based out of the lovely town of Saskatoon. More importantly, these guys are on a mission to help us connect the Pacific to the Hudson Bay. They're working on economic corridors, pulling in relations here back and forth. Please rise and give them a round of applause for the work that they're doing.

The Speaker: Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you my constituent Dr. Mary Alabi as well as Yulian Korataiev. They are representatives of the Alberta International Medical Graduates Association, an organization that is dedicated to the successful integration of internationally trained physicians. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly my mom, Josie Fir, friend Cathy Harbinson, friends and constituents Lyle Rowe and Diana Rowe, and guests Craig Broddy and Debby Ronden. Please rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, it's a great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly one of the most important individuals in my life, my daughter Taslim Mohammed and her future husband, Xamsa Khadar, who is visiting us from Finland. They are getting married on the 7th of December. I asked them if they could invite members of the two aisles, and their response was: let's observe the Chamber.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you two members of my constituency, John and Kelly Fredericks. They are here today to witness their petition being tabled in the Chamber. If they could please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Gurtej Brar: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce three of my best friends, Huninder Mann, Dalbir Dhindsa, and Lakhvir Sidhu. They have always stood by me through high and low. They always step forward when community needs them. I'm proud to have their friendship. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you members of Action Plus, a francophone community organization that works to empower newcomers, women, seniors, and members of the disability community. I'd like to introduce Maguy Nzumba, the CEO; Ketsia Ngasa; Konan Adjoua Clarisse; Capela Donne; and Fredmar De Sounga. If they would rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly our guests from Calgary, Sabu Alexander from Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute, who has played a key role in strengthening academic ties for Alberta in India, and Alpa Mehta, president of UP Association of Calgary. Please rise and accept the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Yaseen: Mr. Speaker, to you and through you I'm happy to introduce Lalitha Dwivedula, who has been a volunteer for two decades in Calgary. She is here with her husband, Shailesh, and their son Pranav. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly the town of Coaldale mayor, Jack Van Rijn, councillors Jason Beekman, Lisa Reis, Bill Chapman, Jordan Sailer, Dale Pickering, Jason Abrey, and their administration staff Cameron Mills, Jonathan Wensveen, and their CAO Kalen Hastings. I just heard that he and his wife are expecting. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there any other introductions? Camrose.

Ms. Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the privilege to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly Robert Fernandez and Yasmin Jivraj, directors from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. Their leadership is helping more Albertans discover and celebrate the talent of local artists while expanding access to art programming that places creativity back into the hands of the people. Please rise and accept the warm welcome of this Chamber.

1:40

Members' Statements

Tourism Industry

Mrs. Petrovic: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to share some exciting news that puts Alberta on the global stage. *Travel + Leisure*, one of the world's most respected travel magazines, has named Alberta among the top 50 places to visit in 2026. Our province was also named the most desirable region worldwide at the *Wanderlust* magazine travel awards in London. It's easy to see why we earned this recognition. From the epic peaks of the Canadian Rockies to the blue skies that line our rolling prairies, Alberta offers landscapes that will truly take your breath away, and our hospitality is second to none. Our towns and cities offer something for everyone.

This recognition also highlights Alberta's resilience and innovation. Jasper is bouncing back after the devastating wildfires of 2024, and other major projects are under way across the province to enhance the visitor experience. The Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise is introducing their new thermal wellness facility, a great way to avoid the dishes. Calgary's Glenbow Museum is contemplating an ambitious renovation, and Edmonton was recently chosen as the site of a new Nordic spa that is slated to open in 2028. Alberta was the only Canadian destination in the world to make this prestigious list alongside places like Guatemala and New Zealand. Last month *National Geographic* also named Alberta as a top travel spot, reinforcing what we already know. Our province is a world-class destination for adventure, culture, and national beauty.

Mr. Speaker, this recognition is more than a point of pride; it's also an opportunity. Tourism is a vital part of Alberta's economy, supporting over 260,000 jobs and contributing over \$11 billion to our GDP. As we look ahead to 2026, let's continue to invest in Alberta's tourism sector and ensure that visitors from around the globe experience everything that makes our province extraordinary, prosperous, and unforgettable.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Bill 11

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, Albertans want more doctors, less time waiting in emergency departments, and shorter wait times for surgeries. The UCP's American-style two-tier health care undermines access, pulls resources out of Alberta's public health care system, and leads to longer wait times and poorer health outcomes.

When your loved ones suffer from an injury or a serious illness, you will likely go to almost any length to get the help they need. Private health care means that in order to do that, you have to pay out of pocket. In the United States people might have to take out loans or even sell their homes in order to get the health care they need or suffer in pain without it in private health care. What sort of business plan, Mr. Speaker, depends on the misery and anxiety of people in need to feed a private for-profit system of health care? The erosion by the UCP government of our universal public health system is unconscionable and will put people's lives at risk as they suffer in pain.

Twenty-five years ago the Alberta Conservatives tried to impose private health care in Alberta with what was called again Bill 11. Albertans pushed back, and the Conservatives backed down. During that struggle, Dr. Walley Temple, chief of surgical oncology at the Tom Baker Centre said, "Some aspects of our humanity are not for commerce. Not blood, not organs, not children and not medicine."

We can stop the UCP creep towards American-style private health care. We will invest in our hospitals, clinics, and community care centres. We will train and support our health care professionals. We will ensure that you and your family get the high-quality health care you need in a timely manner without having to pay out of pocket.

Labour Relations with Teachers

Mr. Yao: To strike or not to strike: was that the question, Mr. Speaker? As a former member of the International Association of Firefighters, local 2494, I do recall a couple of instances where our contract negotiations went well past the deadlines and resulted in us working without a contract. As we were classified as essential workers, we could not strike.

I can also tell you that our members had no desire to strike. We loved our jobs and our service to the community. We also knew we were already getting a reasonable compensation, enabling us to live a decent lifestyle and support our families. We also knew that when the negotiations would finish and the contract was signed, we would get a retroactive paycheque that covered the difference in salary from the time of our last collective agreement.

I recognize that our educators are not considered essential workers as there is no life risk involved in the field should they withhold their services, but I do wonder about the children. As we learned after COVID, the isolation of kids not being in school causes anxiety, depression, social development issues, and other behavioural issues. If we do recognize those impacts on children and if we value our children, shouldn't we classify teachers as essential workers?

To strike or not to strike? The challenges in the classrooms are real and acknowledged. High-needs kids amongst ordinary kids was a noble effort in inclusivity. Sounds like this needs some refining. Language barriers in the classroom: talk to Katy Perry's latest beau about his immigration policies of the last decade. Kids dealing with addiction issues: we'll thank the NDP-Liberal coalition for safe – no, safer – supply as to where these kids are getting these drugs from. Overcrowding of classrooms: well, admittedly, that was us. We are victims of our own success as Canadians continue to move to Alberta for hope and opportunity.

If the decision to strike is less about students and more about union executives chasing their next political headline, then they need to keep it classy. The extreme left seems determined to turn every disagreement into a street theatre performance, complete with outrage and attempts at intimidation. Alberta does not need that show. We need calm heads, real conversations, and a focus on what actually helps our kids.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Nonprofit-sector Supports

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's affordability crisis is real and worsening with no end in sight. Lack of housing, rising food costs, and stagnant wages continue to put vulnerable populations and working families under severe strain. This crisis is also impacting many organizations in our vital nonprofit sector. Nonprofit organizations are the backbone of our communities, providing essential services to thousands of Albertans, yet rising commercial rents and inflation threaten their ability to keep the doors open.

For example, in the heart of Calgary's Beltline community is a historic YWCA building, or, as it's affectionately known today, the Old Y. It is a century-old landmark that has long served Calgary as a vibrant hub for grassroots organizations and community initiatives.

The Old Y has been a lifeline for nonprofit organizations in need of affordable, centrally located space. The organizations that called the Old Y home helped address community safety and offered front-line support for the most vulnerable in Calgary. But as of September 30 the building has been sitting vacant. The landlord for the nonprofits in the Old Y terminated its lease with the city, requiring more than 65 organizations to relocate. Affordable rents and the location of the Old Y helped make it the grassroots hub that it was.

There is no permanent program that provides ongoing rent assistance for nonprofits. These organizations contribute over \$5.5 billion annually to our economy and employ nearly 300,000 people, but without support many will be forced to reduce services or close entirely. I urge this government to work with stakeholders to create solutions that ensure nonprofits have the space they need to continue their vital work. This is not just about buildings; it's about protecting community resilience and Alberta's future.

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

Support for Small Business

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to bring attention to the backbone of our province's economy, those who open their doors early, stay up late, and pour their hearts into their work. Alberta's small-business owners are not just running businesses; they're building communities. But they're also facing pressure like never before. Inflation is hitting them from every angle. Rent is climbing, supplies cost more, utilities are skyrocketing, and wages must be competitive. Running a business is tough, but running a

business when every dollar earned must be stretched beyond its limits: that's a whole new level of stress.

A recent national survey by Abacus Data and Yahoo Canada revealed what many of us already know: small-business owners are burning out. They're constantly adapting to rising costs and staffing shortages. Seventy-eight per cent put inflation as their top concern, but there are also worries around interest rates and operating costs. Nearly 7 in 10 feel like they're being treated unfairly compared to the big corporations.

It's unacceptable, Mr. Speaker. These people work hard every day without teams of lawyers and accountants helping them navigate regulations. The resilience and commitment is what makes Alberta strong. These hard-working people are not asking for special treatment, just a fair shot. They're asking for this government to keep pushing to support the reality they live every day and do what must be done to give them a chance to thrive. They want recognition, fairness, and relief from the constant pressure they're under.

They deserve this chance, Mr. Speaker. These are the people who hire locally, sponsor schools and youth sports, and who know your name when you walk through the door. They're the same people who took a leap of faith to try and build something better for their families. We're committed to standing with them. We will continue to reduce unnecessary costs, cut red tape, and ensure our policies support those who are trying to make a living because when the small businesses of Alberta survive, so does the rest of Alberta.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Election Recall Petitions

Mr. Nenshi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, over the last few weeks the Premier and her ministers have often said that the Recall Act should only be used for egregious violations of trust such as being charged with a criminal offence, but I've been thinking that you shouldn't have to go through the whole recall process to deal with someone like that. There should be other mechanisms, and indeed the UCP caucus has in recent times removed a member charged with a criminal offence. So I wonder if the Premier could clarify that she would remove from her caucus any member who is charged with an offence under provincial or federal law.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier of Alberta.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that none of my MLAs are at all worried about defending their record in public. In fact, our Minister of Education and Childcare, the MLA for Calgary-Bow, is investing nearly \$10 billion in education, more than any other government in the history of Alberta. He reduced child care parent fees to \$15 a day, and as Minister of Advanced Education he saw multiple universities in the province enter the top 100 global list. This is a record that my minister is going to be able to stand on, and I know he can't wait to go out there and campaign on it.

Mr. Nenshi: Well, given that lack of answer we have to assume she's happy with keeping people charged with a criminal offence in her caucus, but certainly her members are not so confident defending their records. We've seen example after example of that. Yesterday the Premier implied that MLAs have full access to the voters list from Elections Alberta to do with as they wish, but of

course that's not what it says in the Election Act. Section 20 of the Election Act clearly states what you can do with the list, which is only for communicating with constituents. So would the Premier agree that exposing personal information is a violation of the Election Act?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, it turns out the MLA was mistaken. That individual, as it's publicly available, signed on saying that he was not on the voter list, but he ended up voting. I can tell you, though, that the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction and the MLA for the Morinville-St. Albert constituency has a very proud record to stand on. He is overseeing a major overhaul of registries, a major overhaul of land titles. He's done a major overhaul of some of the approaches that we're taking at AGLC to ensure that more businesses have less red tape. He's doing a great job.

Mr. Nenshi: There were two fascinating things in that response. One, it's okay to do something illegal if you were wrong, and two, the elections list is somehow publicly available, which it is not. In fact, Elections Alberta makes it clear that anyone in a recall process, including the MLA, is not allowed to use the electors list. The minister clearly did so. There's no doubt about it. He did it. It's very, very clear. So given that he has on the face of it violated the law, will the Premier remove him from her cabinet and her caucus?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know the member opposite likes to think of himself as judge, jury, and executioner, but we do have due process in this province. I think the process that we're going through right now is one where my MLAs are all going to be able to go out to the public and talk very confidently about the record of this government and the record in their ministries. The minister in particular acted when the members opposite did not, making sure that we have a framework to protect citizens on life leases. They had an opportunity to act on this in 2017. They chose not to. We acted, and that is one of the things that the minister is going to be able to proudly go out and talk about.

The Speaker: The second set of questions goes to the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Nenshi: The Premier is really going to her notes today, Mr. Speaker, because these are tough questions. But I am thrilled to hear her defend due process in a government that just this session has said that they have contempt for the courts and for due process.

Recovery Community Contracts

Mr. Nenshi: Now, let's talk about another example of that. On December 1, 2022, with this Premier in office, a company with deep, close ties to the UCP government was incorporated. Within weeks this brand new company got \$70 million in government contracts. [interjection] How did a company with no experience get \$70 million in government contracts?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite will remember that, go back six years ago, the entire world was talking about safe consumption sites, safe supply. In British Columbia they were actually providing millions of dollars of hydromorphone that found its way into schools and is killing people. That was what the NDP approach was; our approach is a recovery-oriented system of care. There were 40 different organizations that were wanting to partner

with us. They received an e-mail on that RFP, and the one that won is the one that is now operating our facilities, and they're doing a great job of it.

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

Let's only hear the person asking the question and then only the person answering the question. Right now that's the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Nenshi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Four opportunities, a half an answer so far, but the half an answer was interesting there. You only do an RFP because you want lots of people to bid on it so you can drive the price down. In this case there was no open RFP. As the Premier just admitted, the government only e-mailed the opportunity to close friends of theirs. No business runs like this. This is incompetent. This is not due diligence, but we also saw it in the DynaLife scandal: RFPs written for only one proponent. Is it the practice now to write RFPs tailor-made only for the government's friends to win contracts?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, this goes back to 2021 and 2022, which was when AHS was responsible for the procurement process. What happens in government is we identify a policy objective we want to achieve, not safe supply putting illegal drugs in the hands of kids, like the NDP want to do, but making sure we actually support recovery . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, remember that part where we hear the question and the answer? I know you do. Let's try to hear the answer, shall we? You don't have to like it. You just have to hear it.

Ms Smith: Our policy was one of recovery. There were 40 different entities that AHS thought might be able to provide this service. One of them emerged as the successful proponent, and as a result we have continued to expand our recovery communities. We've expanded therapeutic living units. We have expanded addictions counsellors, and it's working, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Nenshi: You know, this is odd. The Premier usually at least tries to answer the questions, and we're not seeing a lot of that today because I think she's uncomfortable with the answers.

The Deputy Minister of Mental Health and Addiction said, quote: they've got big questions about even the recovery communities and how they're connected to this Sam. Unquote. Sam, of course, being the Minister of Justice's best buddy Sam Mraiche. We asked at Public Accounts for the investigation that theoretically cleared. We still haven't seen it. Will the Premier do the right thing and table that internal investigation today?

Ms Smith: Well, yes, Mr. Speaker. We already did. We tabled the three letters from the three Indigenous communities that had done their procurement. We give a grant to Indigenous communities. They do their procurement. As I've mentioned in this Chamber and as the document will show, it's a case of mistaken identity. There was a misunderstanding about who actually owned that company. I would invite the members opposite to look at the name of the company, look up the long tenure that company has servicing northern Alberta and those communities in particular so that they don't continue to make this mistake.

The Speaker: The third set of questions goes to the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Nenshi: Of course, Mr. Speaker, tabling letters is not the same as tabling the investigation, and certainly in that investigation the government themselves said that this is a company that has no experience running recovery centres, but we're giving them a contract anyway.

Health Care Workforce

Mr. Nenshi: That said, doctors don't like this government's for-profit health care scheme. The head of the AMA told Radio Canada that most people who've done this run into problems. The former dean of the U of C's med school says: all of the Premier's comparisons are to countries that don't look the same as us and have more physicians than we do. Where will the physicians come from to staff this parallel system?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to give credit to my health ministers. They are doing a tremendous job of attracting all kinds of health professionals across the board. We are very pleased that the HSAA has just approved their collective agreement. That's going to allow us to attract more medical professionals. We have more nurse practitioners who are coming here, in fact a 77 per cent increase, including 90 that are able to do private practice – can't do that anywhere else in the country – and a 33 per cent increase in the number of RNs. We've also seen an increase in the number of physicians; 12,769 are now registered in Alberta, and we're going to get a whole lot more.

2:00

Mr. Nenshi: This is the most fascinating day. She's managed to get to .75 of an answer in five tries.

This scheme assumes that doctors, nurses, and anaesthetists would be thrilled to work in the evenings and on the weekends, but what we know is that health care workers are burnt out. From the head of the Canadian Medical Association to orthopaedic surgeons in Red Deer, doctors say that they don't have the physical capacity to do any more surgeries. They're not sitting around all day waiting for things to do. How will this plan ensure that they don't use that limited physical capacity to perform . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, when I stand up, it's time to stop talking.

The Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, the member opposite doesn't understand that there are a number of operating rooms that are currently sitting idle, and the reason for that is that the current system rations the number of operating room days to their surgeons. I've got surgeons who would love to be in the operating room seven days a week, but they can't because they're only given six days a month. In fact, Dr. Chris Sims, an anaesthesiologist from Calgary, said, "I applaud the Alberta government for considering [allowing] more private . . . care . . . I know first-hand that there are many health-care workers who would provide more service" and also come out of retirement.

Mr. Nenshi: Well, the Premier just highlighted precisely what this government broke: inefficient allocation of existing resources. Instead, they're wasting money on creating new private resources. It's not just about surgeons. It's about anaesthetists, nurses, operating room techs, everyone else who makes surgeries work. We have a critical shortage of staff in all of these areas, and public operating rooms, as the Premier just admitted, are sitting empty because of bad planning from this government and her ministers.

Does the government have any plan to increase the number of health care workers, or do they think moonlighting will solve the problem?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would say that one of the things we observed is that we've got a number of workers who come into our system and then they get burnt out after five years. That's why we're addressing issues on the front line with our paramedics. I was pleased to see that HSAA agreed to the agreement that had been negotiated. That's going to allow for us, I think, to make sure that we're taking care of working conditions so that we can attract more paramedics to come into the system and stay longer. Also, we're just seeing it. Nurse practitioners have more opportunity here. That is why they're coming. Right now we've got our nurses only working 30 per cent full-time shifts. We're going to be addressing those kinds of working conditions to ensure . . .

The Speaker: The next question goes to the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Recovery Community Contracts

(continued)

Member Eremenko: A private, for-profit company named ROSC Solutions Group received four bundled granting contracts through Mental Health and Addiction. They total \$70 million. Earlier this week the deputy minister said that the grant competition was posted online, but FOIP documents and the Premier say that they were not posted; instead, they were e-mailed to a list of preselected applicants. Multimillion-dollar contracts to preselected for-profit companies for health care delivery: hmm, sounds familiar. Next time the Auditor General investigates Mental Health and Addiction, will they find shredded documents and missing e-mails, just like they did with DynaLife?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is actually still posted online if they can use that computer thing there.

Mr. Speaker, you know, one of the groups that's involved in that is called Beccarian. Let me tell you about this group. They work in our prisons. It's called therapeutic living communities. We've got the prisoners there that come into our communities. I've been into this. I've seen this. They're high-fiving the guards. They're playing volleyball with them. These people come out of these facilities; they want to go back and help people. That's part of the plan. They go back and work in our communities. They're going back and helping other people. We save lives.

Member Eremenko: The CEO of RSG is a pal and former colleague of the Premier's former chief of staff, Marshall Smith. The freedom of information documents show that with the \$70 million granted by the UCP government, RSG has made a lot of profit and has created multiple corporate subsidiaries. Did either the former or current Minister of Mental Health and Addiction ever say: stop; this doesn't pass the sniff test? Did either of them have the courage to stand up to the Premier's office and call out the gravy train? [interjections]

The Speaker: We're going to hear from the hon. minister now.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They brought up Marshall Smith. Let me tell you about Marshall Smith. He's a recognized

expert in the field of addiction recovery. To quote the chair of *The Lancet* commissions on the North American opioid crisis and the former White House drug policy adviser to Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama, Marshall Smith is “one of the most gifted public-policy [experts] I have ever worked with.” They should listen to this. He works across the country, and he’s recognized in his field everywhere.

Member Eremenko: Advice to the minister recommended that RSG receive the grant for the Gunn recovery community, the treatment services and correctional facilities, the Recovery Training Institute, and a capacity building grant, all in February 2023. Mr. Speaker, ROSC Solutions Group didn’t exist until December 1, 2022, three months before, but ministry advice said that RSG should win the contracts because, quote, RSG is a well-established, nationally recognized addiction treatment provider. How was RSG well established and nationally recognized when the company didn’t even exist three months before the government approved them for \$70 million?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, thank you again. There’s so much good stuff happening out there. Another group we work with is the Bowline group. These people are out there . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Members, I didn’t have any trouble hearing the question. I really want to hear the answer, and you ought to also. Go ahead, Minister.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you. Part of our plan is developing recovery communities, Mr. Speaker. We’ve already got four up and running. The members opposite should take the time to go out and see that and see how these people are surviving out there and doing so well. I invite them to come with me and go down and sit down. We’ll have a meal with them. These people are amazing people. They were down on their luck, and we’re bringing them back. We’re helping them get back into their communities, helping them get back to their families. What this government is focused on is saving lives.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Okay. From now on there are no preambles on supplementals.

Complex Classroom Supports

Ms Chapman: The aggression and complexity action team did great work to help this struggling minister understand the challenges facing Alberta teachers and students. Of course, teachers, parents, and students have been aware for years of the consequences of this government’s choice to fund education at the lowest level per student in the country: overcrowded classrooms and a shocking lack of support for diverse learners. So does the minister get it now, or will he need more committees to help him understand what’s going on in Alberta’s classrooms?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Childcare.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There’s no question, as I’ve said numerous times, that classrooms are larger and more complex today than ever before. That’s precisely why our government has convened the action team on aggression and violence so that we can get expert advice and direction as to how to address some of these issues. It’s why we’ve put forward a Class Size and Complexity Cabinet Committee to help address some of

these challenges, and it’s why we’re continuing to make historic investments into our education system so that we can alleviate these pressures.

Ms Chapman: Given that this committee’s report highlights student mental health as a “significant factor contributing to classroom complexity,” given that the report also notes a rise in students with disabilities that require formal learning supports and that school boards lack the resources to adequately support these students, will the minister stop throwing immigrants under the bus, admit that his government has not supported diversity in the classrooms, and commit today to providing the resources that students need?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:09.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the characterization that anyone is throwing immigrants under the bus is completely disgusting, and any member of this Assembly that makes that kind of allegation should really be ashamed of themselves. The information is very clear. When you look at the number of individuals that the federal government, of course, has let into the country, the numbers are undeniable. Going back to 2022, we would typically see about 900,000 temporary foreign individuals. That number was up to 1.9 million just a couple of years later. We’re working to address those pressures that the federal government has brought forward.

2:10

Ms Chapman: Given that the only commitment heard from this government when it comes to classroom complexity is to form more committees, track data they never should have stopped collecting in the first place, and hire education staff at a rate teachers know isn’t nearly enough to address need in the classroom, given that this government has provided action but has once again delivered only words, words, and more words, to the minister: why is this committee not able to make recommendations that would have increased supports and resources for students today?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, in Budget ’24 I increased funding to our education system by approximately 4 and a half per cent and did the same in Budget ’25. In addition, in Budget ’25 I increased spending to the classroom complexity grant by approximately 30 per cent. In addition, I’m very proud of the fact that we’ve launched the largest school construction program in Alberta history to build and renovate 130 spaces across the province. We’ve also moved away from a three-year weighted moving average of funding to a two-year model and provided an increase to many of our base grants as well.

The Speaker: The next set of questions goes to the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following a decade of gross mismanagement of immigration and housing policy by the Liberal-NDP government in Ottawa Canadians are feeling the pinch on limited supplies of affordable housing across the country. Thankfully, Alberta is on track with a record investment year for housing starts, expected to surpass even last year’s historic numbers. To the Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services: how is the government ensuring that our unprecedented housing

construction increases supply for affordable housing across Alberta, including in my riding of Cypress-Medicine Hat?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, in many ways it's simple. We just do the opposite of what the NDP tells us to do. They told us to stifle supply and move Albertans to an encampment policy rather than focusing on increasing supply, making sure that we can restore affordability in our market. We had a record-breaking year last year. We're on track for a record-breaking year this year. We're 12 per cent of the population responsible for 25 per cent of the houses. We're the only jurisdiction where rent is going down by 7 per cent across the province. We bet on Albertans, unlike the NDP, who like to bet against them. We bet on them every time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. Given that Alberta recently announced an additional \$200 million commitment to building affordable units across the province through the affordable housing partnership program and given that this commitment combined with our record housing starts presents a historical opportunity for our province, can the same minister please tell this Assembly how these projects will complement private-sector housing construction and guarantee that low-income families benefit from the increased affordable housing availability?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta already has 90,300 affordable housing units that we work and run with our partners here in the Alberta government. We're also investing right now \$9 billion with our partners between now and 2031. We're halfway through that process of creating another 82,000 affordable households across the province. I'm proud to say that we're 50 per cent of the way complete, so right on track, being able to make sure that that work takes place, which is creating tens of thousands of units all across Alberta. They're going to continue to help make life more affordable for Albertans. The NDP, unfortunately, when they were in power, made no new affordable housing, and affordable housing wait-lists went up under them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. Given that Alberta's record housing starts are driven by faster approvals and fewer regulatory barriers than any other province and given that experts say reducing red tape is key to improving affordability of the housing supply, can the same minister please explain what additional steps this government is taking to sustain the momentum, reduce costs, and ensure Albertans can have access to homes that meet their needs without facing delays or skyrocketing costs?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I started off saying, the number one thing that we're doing is doing everything opposite of the NDP, who oversaw one of the largest decreases in housing all across this province. We went the opposite way, again, betting on Albertans, investing in reducing red tape, which has resulted in record-breaking housing years year after year after year underneath the leadership of this government. We are going to continue to work with our municipalities, as an example just recently with the city of Edmonton working on repurposing school lots for housing, which is why the *Edmonton Journal* called Alberta a mecca of housing in Canada.

Energy Industry Liability Management

Ms Al-Guneid: Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege to meet landowners in Warburg. Albertans joined the conversation at a rural community hall near canola and rye fields overlooking Alberta's stunning blue skies. A perfect summer evening except that these Albertans were concerned about the UCP's mature asset strategy that will not enforce the law to clean up the mess of bankrupt oil and gas companies on their land. To the Premier: why are there zero mentions of the polluter-pays principle . . .

Mr. Schow: What do you know about rural Alberta?

Ms Al-Guneid: . . . in this new incarnation of R-star?

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:16.
The hon. Minister of Energy and Minerals.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. I'm not sure what she's talking about. The last folks that were talking about using government money to clean up the mess was the NDP when they were in government. We're not going to allow taxpayers' money to go to clean up a mess from corporations. Corporations are going to bear that responsibility because Albertans have been clear to us that they should pay for that. They will.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that the AER CEO cancelled hearings and directed project applications to the energy minister's chief of staff and deputy minister, given that there should never be correspondence between the regulator and the chief of staff in relation to a current application before the AER, this is political interference. How can rural Albertans trust that this CEO has the public's interest in mind when he should be enforcing the law to clean up the mess, and when will the Premier start an investigation into this interference in the regulator?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, I'm so sorry to laugh, but I'm amused because the last time they were in government was the only time – and, in fact, it was a one-and-done government. They actually let the AER run a scam inside of the AER using taxpayers' money for personal purposes. We're not going to allow that to happen. We have the best regulator in the world. The AER is internationally recognized for doing good, independent work for the people of Alberta, and that's what they're going to continue to do under this government.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that 92 per cent of Albertans expect the government to enforce the law on polluter pays, given that the Premier's office employs R-star lobbyists who worked with the Premier in her past life as an R-star lobbyist, given that the Premier's mentor and friend David Yager is a special adviser to the Executive Council and on this scheme, why would any landowner or any Albertan in this province take this mature asset strategy with any shred of credibility? This is R-star on steroids.

Mr. Jean: I find the description very interesting, indeed, Mr. Speaker. It's simply not true. We've talked to Albertans. We've clearly talked to industry. We've talked to stakeholders. We've talked to municipalities. We have come forward with a plan. That plan is very detailed. We continue to develop that plan. Nothing is perfect, but we've found some really good steps forward. We've taken those steps forward. We'll continue to do more steps forward, but Dave Yager is an internationally recognized expert in the field.

That's who we rely on, the people that actually know what they're talking about, unlike the NDP.

Private Security Services Training

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, the security industry is booming. Faced with unprecedented levels of crime and social disorder and a lack of support from government, more and more businesses and residences are turning to private security. These guards are facing greater threats due to increased substance use, mental health crises, the use of weapons like bear spray or knives. Three were killed at work in the last two years, yet the curriculum used to train these guards is badly out of date, 15 years old. To the minister of public safety: when can we expect to see a badly needed update to the Alberta basic security training curriculum?

Mr. Ellis: Certainly my heart goes out to anybody who's injured in the line of duty. I myself was a security guard for many years in the province of Alberta and served the company I worked for and my clients, I would hope, with great regard. I can tell you that the department is certainly looking into any security guard actions or anything that needs to be taken to make sure we protect them. We know that it's a difficult job out there, as is peace officering as well as policing.

2:20

Mr. Shepherd: Given it's my understanding the minister has already commissioned an update of the Alberta basic security training curriculum and given it's my understanding he contracted that work to someone from outside the security industry and given that my understanding is that there have been no public consultations with stakeholders in the security industry, given that in September we wrote and we asked them to meet with the owners of BPSK9 Alberta canine security services, who raised these concerns with us, and given they're here today, will the minister commit to meeting with them to discuss their concerns and hear an industry perspective on this needed curriculum update?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, as a former security guard myself I'm more than happy to meet with any one of my current or former colleagues, quite frankly. I understand the challenges of that job, but make no mistake that soft-on-crime policies have wreaked havoc in this country. It is a problem that we are facing throughout Canada, and we're doing whatever we can to make sure security guards stay safe, peace officers stay safe, and, most importantly, including that police officers stay safe.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, given that I don't understand why the minister won't speak to the fact that he's already started this review and people want to know about it and given that training for security guards is handled by private contractors who rely heavily on self-directed, online learning over in-person classes and given that I've heard concerns that this approach allows trainees to game that system, rely on friends, share information online, and do more to skip through the coursework and cheat on tests and that means that people with inadequate training are being put in increasingly dangerous situations without the skills to handle them, to the minister: when will he take action to hold training contractors accountable to ensure guards are properly trained?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, security guards do not have the level of training of a peace officer or a police officer. I think I need to be very clear on this. Their job is certainly to observe, to report. Certainly, if they do engage in something where a situation might be dangerous, I encourage anyone, as any citizen who has the same

power as a security guard, to call the police for assistance. I can tell you that we will make sure that we keep our security guards safe.

Supports for Seniors

Mr. Cyr: Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to increasing the standard of living for all Albertans. As part of this mission, we're investing in the well-being of senior citizens across the province, including my constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul. Many constituents have spoken to me about the outdated facility at the St. Paul seniors lodge. To the Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services: what is our government doing to improve the lives of seniors in northeast Alberta?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, thanks for the question, to the hon. member, and thank you for his hard work in his constituency. I was there not too long ago touring it with him. He did a great job of advocating for the needs of seniors in his community. It's why I'm happy today to announce that we're spending \$16 million as a result of his advocacy to upgrade the St. Paul seniors lodge, which will grow their capacity to 150 units, all part of the \$9 billion that we're investing in housing all across this province to make us the most affordable jurisdiction in the country. I'm proud to also say that we're now seven of the 10 most affordable jurisdictions in Canada because of the investments of this government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's great news, Minister.

Given the rural nature of my constituency the St. Paul seniors lodge provides vital services not only to the residents of St. Paul but also to the residents of the surrounding region and further given that increases we make to our local infrastructure mean increases in their quality of life, to the same minister: what are some of the benefits we are investing in these important facilities and others like it?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've already invested in 90,300 units of affordable housing. We're working right now to create another 82,000 affordable households all across Alberta, including in the north. Those include senior lodges, continuing care spaces, and affordable homes that help with low-income individuals as well as the work that we do with the homeless to create emergency spaces. One of the biggest investments we're doing that unfortunately was not kept care by many previous governments is that we're investing significantly in continuing care to make sure our seniors are not abandoned in the hospital anymore like they were underneath the NDP government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the minister for that response. Given that senior citizens have contributed greatly to this province and our local governments respect and honour these contributions and further given that many seniors have unique needs that require assistance to live well, to the same minister: what is our government doing to support these seniors to live happy, healthy lives that they so greatly deserve?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're investing \$6 billion this year alone inside our senior population, helping with things like housing, helping with access to food and services, helping with access to medical supports and social supports all across Alberta. The number one thing, though, that we're doing is that we're investing in continuing care spaces. We're rejecting the NDP policy of leaving our grandparents and our parents abandoned in the acute-

care system, blocking those beds for future patients, and instead making sure that money goes to proper continuing care homes so both systems can do their job going forward.

Bill 11

Member Irwin: I spend a lot of time listening to Albertans, hearing constituents' concerns, and knocking on doors all across our province, and one of the top issues by far is health care. As Canadians we are so proud of public health care and a system that prioritizes people and not profits. Public health care is something that distinguishes us from the United States, and it's something that we as legislators should be strengthening, not forcefully dismantling. We know that this Premier idolizes Trump, but how can she possibly in good conscience put forward Bill 11 and attack a cornerstone of what it means to be Canadian?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Member Irwin: That's public health care.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:26.
The hon. minister of health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members once again have it incorrect. We are not looking at the U.S. We are in fact looking at Europe, where they have excellent health care. They have a universal health care system that, in fact, is augmented by the nonprofits and the private system. That's what we want. That's what Albertans deserve. Dual practice also exists in Quebec as well as New Brunswick. I don't know why the members opposite don't want the best for Albertans.

Member Irwin: Given that this UCP government has a horrendous track record on health care after dismantling AHS, awarding sketchy contracts to their friends, and wasting hundreds of millions on failed experiments like DynaLife and Albertans have been clear that they do not want American-style health care, they do not want to pay out of pocket just to see a doctor and given that this government campaigned on protecting public health care and now they've shown with Bill 11 that they are shredding that promise, will they call an election today and let Albertans decide?

The Speaker: There was some doubt about whether I announced a point of order at 2:26, so I just reannounced it.
The minister of health. Go ahead.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans did decide. In fact, they fired the members opposite. You know why they fired them? They fired them because under their watch health care actually got worse. In 2014, before the NDP, Albertans waited an average 204 days for a hip surgery. After, in 2018, 265 days. In 2014 Albertans waited an average 44 days for CT scans. In 2018, 113 days under the NDP.

Member Irwin: Given that the UCP keeps asking Albertans to trust them when it comes to health care, we've seen their record: millions wasted on useless Turkish Tylenol, ballooning surgical wait-lists, the use of the notwithstanding clause to restrict Charter-protected rights to health care – shall I go on? – and given that they claimed they'd fix health care in 90 days but instead of solutions it's more chaos, more corruption, more privatization, and more folks waiting in our ERs, where will it end? Why has this government made a mess of everything they touch in health care? When can regular folks get ahead instead of just those with the ability to pay?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're going to continue to listen to Albertans, and we're going to continue to listen to doctors. Dr. Trevor Brooks is a plastic hand and reconstructive surgeon from Medicine Hat, and he wrote this.

Your proposal offers a tangible solution by creating a framework that better utilizes my skills and capacity, directly addressing the bottlenecks I face every day. It provides a clear path to increase the total number of surgeries provided in this province. This is not an abstract ideological debate; it is a practical mechanism to get my patients out of pain and back to their lives sooner.

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

2:30

Support for Agriculture

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Agriculture is one of the keystones of the economy in my constituency out in God's country. It wouldn't be the same without it. After all, if you ate today, you'd better thank a farmer. Too often farmers and ranchers find themselves bogged down and hindered by red tape or, as they call it in our area, orange tape from when that last crew went through. To the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation: what is the government doing to remove that red or orange tape for agriculture producers in the province?

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, Mr. Speaker, unlike the NDP opposite, who ambushed our farmers and ranchers through Bill 6, this government will continue to support our farmers and ranchers and do everything to get out of their way. That's why we updated the agriprocessing investment tax credit, to increase more investment. We've reduced regulations on our ag marketing boards by almost 30 per cent, but most importantly the Premier has tasked me with developing agriculture-first legislation to further reduce red tape, remove barriers, and improve the competitiveness of our ag sector. This work is vital, and I look forward to getting this done for our farmers and ranchers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that. Given that nobody in this province loves and respects the land more than farmers and ranchers, stewards of the land here through and through; undoubtedly there needs to be a compromise, though, between environmental protection and growing and working on the land and given the global demand for world-class, Albertan agriculture products is increasing and it's putting some pressures on the ecosystems, to the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas: how is the government balancing the environment and agriculture needs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of the environment.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's ag sector not only are experts in food production but also in sustainable conservation and environmental stewardship. Our government is proud to work alongside these producers. With their common-sense ideas and input we're improving the regulatory system, how we manage water, restoring wetlands, and helping speed up land-use planning. For years ag producers have helped steward the land and water that sustains us all while, of course, producing the food that people around the world need, and our government will continue to stand alongside them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and, again, for that answer from the minister. Given the increased demand on water resources in the province and that many agricultural producers are concerned about securing their fresh water supply and, as Mark Twain had said once, whisky is for drinking and water is for fighting over and given that small, family-owned farms and ranches don't have the lobbying power of larger corporate and industrial water users, to the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas: what is the government doing to ensure fairness in the allocation of water for all of our producers?

The Speaker: The minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate the member's question. As environment minister I am focused on making sure that we're encouraging responsible water management, driving more water reuse and reducing, in some cases, the amount of fresh water that we have to pull for all industrial users, and making sure that more water is in fact available for farmers and ranchers across our province. We're also looking to make the system as fair and transparent as possible, and that is why we tabled Bill 7, including the feedback that we got from farmers, ranchers, and the ag community. If passed, it will increase transparency, improve monitoring and use of water across Alberta.

Physician Recruitment and Retention

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are facing a growing crisis in accessing family doctors. Fewer family physicians mean longer wait-lists, forcing people to seek care in overcrowded emergency departments. This government has allowed Alberta to fall behind others in physician supply, leaving fewer doctors for every Albertan. Why is the Minister of Primary and Preventative Health Services introducing American-style health care privatization instead of ensuring timely access to primary care doctors for Alberta families?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of primary care.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is absolutely incorrect, as usual, because when we look at the numbers, family physicians have gone from, in 2018, 5,244 to 6,216 and climbing. On the specialist side, 5,430 under the NDP; we're at 6,539. We have seen the largest increase, since the work we've done with the College of Physicians & Surgeons to streamline the process, that has ever existed. We have 12,769 doctors and more coming.

Mr. Haji: Given that the minister continues to predictably cite absolute numbers of family doctors instead of the standard population-to-physician ratio used in health care planning, given that the number of family doctors per 100,000 Albertans increased annually until this government came into office but has decreased every single year since the UCP took office, can the minister put aside the talking points and explain why the government has failed to apply basic population health metrics to ensure supply of physicians to the required population?

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

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the member opposite not understand that the more doctors we have, the more services they provide . . .

Ms Gray: Point of order.

Member LaGrange: . . . the more ability they have to take on new patients? We have over 600 doctors in the province right now taking new patients on. These are family physicians taking on new patients. I know that when I first started, it was just a handful. We need to celebrate that. The members opposite should join us in celebrating the fact that we're able to attract and retain more physicians. We have more medical residents as well in the province, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Haji: Given . . .

The Speaker: Oh, sorry, hon. member. You get a fresh 35.

A point of order was noted at 2:35.

Please go ahead.

Mr. Haji: Given that the minister deserves better briefing notes, given that rural Albertans face worsening physician shortages and that emergency room closures are becoming routine, given that emergency room visits in urban centres have surged since the UCP took office and given that families across Alberta, rural and urban, are unable to find family doctors, why is this government incapable of figuring out that lack of strong primary care is the key factor that drives Albertans into crowded emergency rooms? [interjections]

The Speaker: There's some back and forth that's more than needed. The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the member opposite needs to look beyond his own question notes. The fact of the matter is that we have more physicians, more family physicians. Under the new primary care compensation model we are seeing more physicians take on more patients. And you know what? They're coming to rural Alberta. In fact, through the bursary program for medical residents we now have 106 medical residents that have signed contracts to work in rural, remote locations. They're in our rural communities.

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

Support for Immigrants

Mr. Gurtej Brar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just last year the Premier demanded Ottawa to double Alberta's provincial nominee program numbers, but now the same government blames increasing ER wait times, overcrowded classrooms, and rising rents on immigrants. Immigrants helped build this province, and they deserve respect, not blame. Why is this government scapegoating immigrants instead of fixing the real problem?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, the only people scapegoating are the members opposite for the mistakes that they made from 2015 to 2019. Let me tell you something. In this province we know that the workforce that we need right now may not be here. That's why we have to increase provincial nominees for economic migrants. But I'll tell you what. The pressures that are being put on our health care system, on the education system, and other social services that we pay for are a direct result of the mismanagement by the federal government and the bosses of the members opposite. The only people who should apologize are the members of the NDP.

Mr. Gurtej Brar: Given that attendees shouted, "Mass deportation," at the Alberta Next Panel and the Premier did not condemn that and given that this failure to condemn sent a clear message across immigrant communities in Edmonton-Ellerslie and across Alberta,

will this Premier apologize for letting anti-immigrant rhetoric grow louder under her watch and for failing to defend the very people who keep Alberta running?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is correct. Albertans deserve an apology: from the opposition. This is the calibre of opposition they have here. In fact, the member referenced the Alberta Next Panel, a public consultation that the Premier held, going from town to town in this province to listen to grassroots Albertans on what matters most to them, the same public consultation that the Leader of the Opposition called a sham. If the Premier doing her job is a sham – I'll tell you what – I would hate to see what the province looks like under the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Gurtej Brar: Given that hatred toward immigrant communities is already rising under this UCP government and given that now the UCP plan to put a citizenship mark on drivers' licences and end diversity, equity, and inclusive programming in Alberta, which only serves to cause more division in our province, Albertans are asking: why is this UCP government taking Alberta in the direction of anger, hate, and division?

2:40

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, the only people trying to divide Albertans are the ones across the aisle playing identity politics. I can tell you that we will take no lessons from the members opposite who spent four long years in government while we waited here and made sure that we created a plan to make Alberta the most prosperous jurisdiction in the country. We are world players, and I can tell you that the numbers speak for themselves. We're winning.

Bullying Awareness and Prevention

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, as an elected official I know first-hand the reality of online bullying, which has become an increasingly serious issue here in Alberta that impacts many of my colleagues and many Albertans. My concern is for the innocent children who witness adults engaging in ridiculous and harmful bullying online. To the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction: what are the potential repercussions for children who observe this harmful behaviour, and what steps is our government taking to address these impacts and provide appropriate supports for these young Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank my colleague for raising this important issue. As a grandfather I, too, worry about the impact of online bullying on children, and seeing adults behave poorly in any situation can normalize harmful behaviour and cause negative feelings. Any Albertan can call 211 Alberta to access the supports that they need close to home, to get anonymous help, or by calling or texting the bullying helpline, 310.1818.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. When children repeatedly see adults bullying other adults online, it can shape their understanding of acceptable behaviour and influence how they interact with their peers. Given these concerns and further given the importance of early guidance, to the same minister: what programs or initiatives are currently available to help children develop healthy coping skills and encourage positive behaviours when they witness online bullying by adults?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Children should never be bullied, of course, whether that's happening online or elsewhere, not by adults or by peers. It weighs heavily on me, as it should on all members of this Chamber, that any child would be subject to this. There are some programs our government supports that are tailored to meeting the needs of youth. This includes our kids help line, which is available 24/7 via call, text, or online chat, or we've got Kickstand youth hubs, which are available both in person or virtually, and we're putting more of those across the province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that parents often struggle with the impact of online bullying, which is even worse when children see adults being bullies, and further given the growing influence of social media and the need for family support, can the same minister please outline what services, educational resources, or partnerships exist to assist families in helping children navigate these situations and promote respectful, safe online environments for all?

The Speaker: The Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Families and parents are often the first line of response when it comes to the mental health and the well-being of our children, and Recovery Alberta offers caregivers resources to help children and teens deal with these mental health topics. Counselling Alberta offers affordable, no-wait counselling options, and 211 Alberta is a conduit to a variety of supports and services in communities across the province. The message is: help is available; reach out if you need it.

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

Members' Statements (continued)

Public Health Care

Mr. Dach: I rise today to speak on behalf of a Calgary resident who has been waiting years for knee replacement surgery. Astrid lives with daily pain as she watches this government dismantle AHS, award questionable contracts, and waste hundreds of millions of dollars on failed privatization efforts. Instead of investing in public health care, the UCP government has already contracted private surgical services that did nothing to address the long-term challenges of our health care system. It just allowed people to pay to jump the queue and took health care workers out of the public system. Now the UCP is asking Astrid to trust them with Bill 11, their attempt to bring in American-style health care to Alberta.

On January 3, after years of waiting, Astrid thought she'd won the golden ticket, an appointment with the Alberta Hip and Knee Clinic. She was told that she'd get an appointment within three to six months. Ten months later she has yet to receive a call. But while waiting, in August Astrid fell and ended up tearing her rotator cuff. She'd already been waiting for years in pain. She struggles to sleep and walk, and she has developed bowed legs as a result of prolonged deterioration. The constant pain leaves her in a foul mood. How can Astrid trust the UCP on health care? She's living with their failed track record daily.

Bill 11 does not increase access to health care for people like Astrid, who can't afford to pay for immediate private surgical care.

It doesn't bring in more doctors, more anaesthetists, more nurses, more people to do the surgeries. It does mean that Albertans will have to pay out of pocket just to see a doctor or have a procedure done.

What we really need is a strong public health care system where patients are not treated like a commodity, where Albertans can see their family doctor and get the treatment they need without having to pay out of pocket. Sustainable, universal public medicare is achievable if we have a provincial government who actually supports it. Alberta's NDP government is waiting . . .

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and enter a petition that's collected signatures from all across the province. It is asking that the government create and pass a bill regarding protecting children and vulnerable people online. The petition is for mandatory social media literacy classes for all elementary students in Alberta.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise on behalf of the constituents of Edmonton-Manning to table a petition urging the government to take all necessary steps to lighten the load for patients and families by reducing additional costs to cancer care, including lab fees, transportation, prosthetics, oncofertility treatments, incontinence products, cooling caps, and so much more.

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

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise to table a petition. This petition was started by one of my constituents, Karima Alibhai, and it's signed by over 300 Albertans. It's asking this Legislature to urge the government to propose a law that protects vulnerable seniors from being transferred between continuing care facilities and keeps them to age in the same continuing care facility that they call home, and it's asking for safeguards for seniors from significant distress, confusion, and mental trauma when they are forced to move to a different facility.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 204

Public Interest Disclosure (Publicly Funded Health Entity Whistleblower Protection) Act

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise to request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 204, Public Interest Disclosure (Publicly Funded Health Entity Whistleblower Protection) Act.

This bill will align legislation with other jurisdictions such as B.C. and Saskatchewan, enabling front-line health care workers who work in publicly funded health care departments, contracted agencies, and long-term care to be able to publicly disclose concerns within our health care system without reprisal. With current changes that are being made by this government within our health care system, this will protect not only workers but the quality of life for all Alberta patients.

[Motion carried; Bill 204 read a first time]

2:50 Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. As chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, in accordance with section 4(7) of the Election Act and section 4(2) of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act, I'm pleased to table the 2024-2025 annual report of the Chief Electoral Officer.

In addition, pursuant to section 4(6) of the Election Act I'm pleased to table the 2024 by-election report for Lethbridge-West.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. First is an e-mail from Liam. Liam works at the Red Deer Save-On-Foods. He earns minimum wage and can't even afford the groceries that he stocks on the shelves at that store.

Then the second tabling is correspondence from the Environment and Protected Areas ministry to one of my constituents telling them that they won't be getting any more e-mails from the department.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Wright: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a *Newsweek* article where a VP of a food production company discusses the 3D-printed meat they use in their products.

Member Ceci: I am tabling 40 letters from Calgary-Buffalo constituents who are uniformly horrified with the government's use of Bill 9, which tramples the human rights of Albertans, particularly trans youth.

The Speaker: Are there any more?

The hon. minister of preventative health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of a letter that I received from Dr. Trevor Brooks. I actually had quoted him earlier today, and he supports our structural reforms and dual practice.

Member Irwin: Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling a letter from a young person, a Gen-Zer who's lived in Alberta their entire life, and they're urging the UCP to listen to the voices of youth across this province.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two tablings; a couple of letters. The first from myself and the Member for St. Albert to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services requesting that he meet with Pierrette and Barry Sharkey of K-9 protective services to discuss their concerns.

And then, secondly, the letter that we received from the minister declining to meet with them, but I will note that he agreed to meet with them after question period today, and I thank him for it.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Ms Fir, Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women, pursuant to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Act, Alberta Foundation for the Arts 2024-25 annual report.

The Speaker: We have come to the part of the day for points of order: 1:56.

The Clerk: Withdrawn.

The Speaker: Withdrawn, okay. Thank you.

The next one was at 2:08 p.m. by the Government House Leader.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I have a different time, but hopefully this is the same one. I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j), where the Member for Calgary-Beddington was speaking and asking a question to the government and said, “Will the minister stop throwing immigrants under the bus?” Yesterday a point of order was ruled when it was suggested that the government of Alberta was blaming South Asians for the crime problem in this province, and that was ruled out of order. This is clearly an insinuation of racism on behalf of the government.

In this particular instance, the Member for Calgary-Beddington directed that comment at the minister of education, suggesting he is throwing immigrants under the bus. Now, that is, of course, a metaphor, at least I pray it’s a metaphor, but even then, the visual of that is really quite disturbing, that kind of language, I think, when referring to a member and suggesting that they’re blaming immigrants for anything. The only issue that we have is the way that immigration has been poorly managed in the country over the last 10 years. As a result of that, we have an issue with that kind of comment.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree that it was a metaphor, and I agree that it was directed at a specific member and, as such, unparliamentary. I will apologize and withdraw on behalf of the member.

The Speaker: Thank you. That was the right way to do that. I will consider this matter dealt with.

Point of order 3 occurred at 2:16 p.m., and I believe it was the Opposition House Leader that did that.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Ms Gray: Correct, Mr. Speaker. At the time the Member for Calgary-Glenmore was asking a question. The Government House Leader, who was not who she was asking the question to, chose to yell across the aisle, “What do you know about rural Alberta?” An insult to that member insinuating that she doesn’t talk to people in rural Alberta, doesn’t have knowledge. It was a direct insult to another member, unparliamentary and unhelpful. For similar reasons that the Official Opposition just apologized and withdrew, I think that the Government House Leader should as well.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would disagree in this instance. The comment was directed at the caucus as a whole. I don’t believe that the NDP caucus, with the exception of the Member for Edmonton-Manning, has any credibility in rural Alberta. As a result, I think that there’s not a whole lot to be said coming from that opposition side.

Now, I will defend this point of order as I am venturing into the waters of debate while the members opposite continue to heckle and

murmur. What I would say is that it appears that the comment created disorder though it was directed at a caucus as a whole. For that reason, I will apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: Okay.

That takes us to point of order 4 at 2:27 p.m., placed by the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Yeah. This one’s lame. Withdraw.

The Speaker: Okay. Well, self-reflection is always a positive, healthy thing.

The next one is at 2:35 p.m. by the Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. In an exchange back and forth between the Member for Edmonton-Decore and the Minister of Primary and Preventative Health Services the minister in response on the record said as part of her response, “Can the member opposite not understand?” Again, specifically talking about the member, in this case insinuating that rather than something being a matter of debate – and I will say that at the time, Mr. Speaker, the minister had one set of numbers and facts; the Official Opposition had another.

The idea of shouting, “Can you not understand?” and implying that it was a comprehension issue rather than a debate of the facts to me crosses the line into insult. The minister is very adept at responding in ways that skirt the line of parliamentary procedure by talking a lot about us as a collective. That’s where the line has been drawn in this place up till now, Mr. Speaker, but referencing a specific member and their comprehension or inability to comprehend crosses the line into an insult for me. I believe it should be ruled out of order and apologized for and withdrawn.

The Speaker: Well, I heard the comments.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, may I present?

The Speaker: Yes, please. The hon. House leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this instance I do believe it is a matter of debate. Countless times in this Chamber since we have reconvened the Legislature and since the throne speech, the Leader of the Opposition and several members in the opposition benches have claimed that this government and specific members of the government benches are incompetent, they don’t know their file. They’ve asked for four ministers to resign. They’ve called for elections. I can tell you that if we’re going to go straight into this water and talk about whether someone does or doesn’t know their file and whether they don’t have the right information and, in this instance, the member doesn’t understand, I would suggest that the members in the opposition benches look inward at the comments they are making because though they may not be a point of order, they are incredibly condescending and they certainly rise to what I think would create disorder in this Chamber. Not even just in this Chamber, but the Leader of the . . . [interjection] I hear a member opposite has something to say, and they will have their chance whenever I finish my remarks. They are more than welcome to. I believe it’s the same member that accused government members in a member’s statement of making a Holocaust comparison.

3:00

Mr. Speaker, what I will continue on my remarks is this. The Leader of the Opposition is guilty on multiple occasions – in fact,

I've started keeping track of it – of calling the Premier and government bench members incompetent. Incompetent. That is out of order. This is not the Calgary city council chambers, where I've seen the member do it there as well. This is the government of Alberta. Not a point of order.

The Speaker: Well, let me say what the Blues say. The quote from the minister is: "Can the member opposite not understand that the more doctors we have, the more services [we] provide." It could suggest the member doesn't know what they're talking about. The member asking the question retorted almost instantly with something else that suggested that the minister better get better notes, which kind of suggests that the member doesn't know what they're talking about. Neither one is helpful. It's become common practice here to suggest the other side doesn't know what they're talking about. It's not helpful. It's the kind of thing that can become a point of order.

It's a matter of debate. I think it's kind of common practice to suggest that the side that the speaker is on understands the issues better than the other side, collectively or individually. It's not helpful. I would caution both sides because it does happen regularly, and frankly it doesn't make the debate in here any better or any more useful. While it's not a point of order, I'm certainly not complimenting the remarks or the behaviour. It's not helpful, and it happens on both sides. I will suggest that both House leaders who are debating this thing now talk to their own members and suggest they do less of what is not helpful.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 7

Water Amendment Act, 2025

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am so pleased to rise today in the House to move third reading of Bill 7, the Water Amendment Act, 2025.

Mr. Speaker, this act will update Alberta's water management system, encourage water recycling and reuse, and therefore make more water available for growing communities, for farmers, for ranchers, for businesses, and for maintaining our aquatic ecosystems. Now, the Water Act hasn't meaningfully been updated in over 25 years, and in that time our population has almost doubled. It's led to increased demand for water from communities across our province and all sectors of our economy.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The amendments we're proposing will help Alberta's water management system meet the challenges of today and tomorrow. For example, the split between the Peace and Athabasca basins can sometimes be a barrier to more practical and efficient water sourcing. By merging these basins together, Madam Speaker, we align the Peace-Athabasca-Slave basin with how the South Saskatchewan basin is managed. This in no way changes existing water allocations, watershed planning, or the work of watershed planning and advisory councils.

Throughout debate over the last few weeks we have heard some over-the-top and inaccurate descriptions of our strong regulatory systems and the process for project approvals. Madam Speaker, there's been some fearmongering and speculation around how approvals move forward, specifically around interbasin transfers,

lower risk interbasin transfers, and I want to be clear. Strong and effective measures remain in place to protect Albertans and our environment. Any interbasin transfer requires an application, evidence of need, risk assessment, and mitigation of potential impacts.

First and foremost, all applications submitted to my department undergo rigorous review. That includes public notice, consultation, and the opportunity for those directly affected to submit a statement of concern where that's appropriate, Madam Speaker. Only after an application has addressed regulatory, technical, and environmental requirements and considerations would it then be referred for a final approval decision. Applications that don't meet our high standards would not come forward for approval.

Now, while lower risk transfers will now move forward, just like they do in every other province in western Canada – so, again, to the members opposite who say it can't be done: it's being done in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, and now that is going to be done here – all higher risk transfers will continue to require approval by a special act of the Legislature, meaning that we still have in place a higher bar for approval where there is evidence of higher risk. The common-sense changes we're proposing keep the Water Act's foundational principles firmly in place: water must be conserved and used wisely, managed effectively, and not wasted.

Bill 7 also improves our ability to support future conservation measures. These amendments will increase transparency, enable standardized measurement and reporting, and allow for the collection of financial information that's associated with water transfers. I think that transparency, Madam Speaker, is good for all water users and good for Albertans.

Bill 7 clarifies key definitions and streamlines regulatory requirements, making it easier for Albertans to use and share water responsibly. By simplifying minor licence changes and enabling better water monitoring and transparency, we're supporting water conservation and the health of our ecosystems.

This bill supports industry, municipalities, and communities by supporting more flexible and efficient water management, including opportunities to use alternative water sources. This was the number one piece of feedback that we received from municipalities over the last two years. This bill also makes it easier for communities and industries to collect rainwater from rooftops and reuse treated waste water. For example, Calgary Shepard Energy Centre now reuses waste water from the Bonnybrook sewage treatment plant for power generation. That avoids nearly 6 million cubic metres of fresh water being withdrawn from the Bow River every single year. That's a great-news story, Madam Speaker. By reusing water for industrial and municipal purposes, we are reducing how much fresh water is taken from rivers, which preserves the natural flows for aquatic life and downstream users. That is a win.

Similarly, the town of Drayton Valley provides treated waste water to local oil companies for operations, saving thousands of cubic metres of fresh water that would otherwise be drawn from the river. That's what we're trying to do here, Madam Speaker, expand that responsible use of the water resources that we have. Bill 7 will encourage more innovative projects just like these and make wastewater reuse a standard practice, helping Alberta continue to lead in sustainable water management.

I also want to make clear that these proposed amendments are about more effectively managing the water within our provincial borders. Alberta will continue to meet our obligations and maintain strong working relationships with counterparts in the Northwest Territories, Saskatchewan, and the United States. As we always have done, we will continue to do.

This bill, if passed, will help improve transparency and streamline regulatory decisions. It's a forward-looking piece of legislation that balances the needs of Albertans, the environment, and our economy both today and for the years ahead. It streamlines processes, strengthens oversight, ensures transparency, all while protecting our water resources for generations to come. These changes will absolutely make our system stronger, Madam Speaker, while keeping the strong foundations that we have in place to meet our province's growing needs.

Madam Speaker, we could not have brought this legislation forward without the thousands of Albertans who took the time to provide their feedback throughout the last two years and multiple phases of engagement. We know that water is a precious and finite resource, and it really meant a lot to me that so many Albertans who care about this resource took the time to give us their thoughts, ask us their questions, and make sure that we get this right.

Special thanks do go out to my colleague the minister of agriculture. We had some very lively and engaging discussions about irrigation and producers and what their needs are and how we can balance the needs of our growing industry and, of course, our ecosystems.

I want to thank the MLA for Cypress-Medicine Hat, who chaired the Water Advisory Committee work that began in a situation of drought and then expanded to help form the basis of this legislation. There was a lot of time. Again, a lot of very interesting and passionate discussions that happened, and I think the member did a very exceptional job of chairing that committee on something that over the years has been contentious, Madam Speaker. There is a reason why the Water Act hasn't been updated in 25 years, because it's hard. It was challenging work, and the work of my colleague – really, we couldn't have done it without him.

I am grateful for the members of the Water Advisory Committee, the municipalities, irrigation districts, producers, industry, my colleague the Associate Minister of Water, who I know in southern Alberta also has very passionate and strong thoughts coming from southern Alberta about how we manage water in our province, and, again, all Albertans.

With that, I'd also just like to thank members of this House for what I think has been some great debate. Thank you for the opportunity to rise on this bill in third reading.

The Deputy Speaker: Are others to join the debate on Bill 7 in third reading? The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

3:10

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, it has been quite a good debate on the Water Act, and it has been nice to kind of dive into water as an issue. I do want to say that I will not be voting in support of this bill today. I don't think that this bill addresses the priorities of Albertans. That's kind of my number one concern. We know, through the results of the engagement and consultation that the minister mentioned, that the top priorities identified were environmental protection and promoting conservation efficiency and productivity improvements to reduce water use. That is not the focus of this bill. The engagement also found strong cross-sector support for establishing and maintaining in-stream flow needs and water conservation objectives for all rivers with water conservation objectives as a key policy tool. Also not in this bill.

I would also add, Madam Speaker, that the only reason I know the results from that consultation is through a FOIP request by an organization that received over 1,000 pages of results from these public consultations. Some of those pages were redacted, so we don't actually – the government has not closed the loop and publicly

released the results of public consultation, and that is also not effective public consultation.

I think that my colleagues and I spoke quite extensively yesterday in Committee of the Whole around what effective consultation looks like and the fact that you can engage people in a conversation, but if you don't incorporate their input into the project or, in this case, the bill, that is not effective consultation. While at the beginning of debate on this bill I did say that the minister and her team invested a lot of time and capacity in engaging with Albertans on this conversation, which they did, that does not mean that I feel that that consultation was effective or at all meaningful.

There were concerns raised about the public consultation when I went back to my stakeholders to ask about it. For example, the public surveys that were online were very onerous to fill out. The first one was scheduled over the holiday season. I had to ask the minister to extend that deadline so people didn't have to fill out an hourlong survey about water over the holidays. The second survey had little to no lead time. The consultation revealed that some large policy shifts were being considered in how water is managed and shared in Alberta that people didn't know were coming. Results of engagement were never summarized and shared publicly, and a FOIP result was the only way we found out. That FOIP result from the first survey revealed some major differences in what was being proposed versus the feedback that was actually collected through the public engagement. That's not effective consultation either. One of my constituents also commented that there wasn't enough information in the public survey for people to make an adequate decision.

This bill and the minister's mandate in general have been about making more water available, which this bill does by increasing bureaucratic efficiencies, which I am in support of, Madam Speaker, but the emphasis of making more water available removes an emphasis on water conservation efforts, and that is what Albertans want to see in updated Water Act amendments.

We are in multiple years of drought. Drought is affecting all parts of the province, even in the north where we have this perception that water is infinite; there's lots of water and fewer people. There is drought in the north. The snowpack is not what it once was, and people really feel that this government is not addressing the key issues, which are the fact that we have less and less water. We definitely have less water available throughout the spring and summer, which raises the issue of water storage quite often, but we shouldn't be talking about water storage without ever talking about water conservation as well.

People really feel that the government is not getting to the heart of this. This bill improves monitoring requirements, which is great, but small and medium licence holders will need support to do this work, and I look forward to hearing about how that will happen when the regulations are shared. Water should be the first consideration when exploring any new project, and that requirement is not in this bill. This summer I was out on various parts of the eastern slopes, and everybody had all these great All-season Resorts Act proposals coming at me, and they're in beautiful spots with no water and with no electricity and no utilities. It's up to the Water Act to really set that standard, that water should be the first thing that people think about when they're thinking about any kind of development.

The act does not mention water quality, and the truth is that we can't keep using more water without impacting water quality. In-stream flows are barely mentioned; I talked about that quite extensively yesterday.

Merging the two northern basins, I still do not feel that the reason for doing that has been justified by the minister. That is not about

management. The minister said multiple times yesterday that all of the existing management plans in the two northern basins will continue to be as they are. If this isn't about management improvement or management effectiveness, Madam Speaker, it sounds to me like it's actually about allowing unlimited interbasin transfers between the two northern basins.

Then, of course, this bill does not mention maybe one of the biggest issues on the minds of Albertans right now, and that is coal mining in our headwaters. It does not provide guaranteed protection of water quality or quantity in the face of coal mining proposals.

One of the biggest things missing from this act, Madam Speaker, is that it doesn't talk about nature-based solutions. I will continue to stand here and champion that ecosystems can do the work for us. Water is climate, and addressing and mitigating climate impacts is about water management just as much as it's about emissions. Adapting to climate change and mitigating those impacts is about managing water. We know that we have more extreme weather events coming. Nature-based solutions can be part of the solution.

What are those solutions, Madam Speaker? Beavers. I've said it in this House before; I'll say it again. I love them. They're cute. They're fuzzy. They just are chomping at the bit to get the work done. Beavers create wetlands, and wetlands hold water. They can hold a lot of water, and beavers will do that work for free. If you're interested, I've got a book in my office, a child's book about how they actually parachuted beavers in, like literally by parachute, as part of a reclamation effort once, which is just a funny story but also very successful.

There are rumours that the minister is talking about changing regulations around wetlands protection on private lands, but the Water Act requires approval for any activity that affects a wetland. So I was kind of surprised that there's no mention of wetlands in this bill.

There is also no mention about working with forestry to change how we do forestry in the headwaters to protect headwaters, to protect the forestry industry, and to provide ecosystem services through this incredible partnership that could exist but, again, it's not mentioned here.

I love it when the Government House Leader stands up and says that we don't have anybody who's aware of rural issues, yet here I am as a rural MLA connecting with rural Albertans every day, Madam Speaker, and talking to rural Albertans who live west of Sundre and Nordegg, not even in my riding but I'm happy to chat with them. They're talking to me about concerns with temporary diversion licences and fracking. They're not against fracking; they love it. It provides jobs. It's great. But they also don't like having dry wells in August. The reality is that temporary diversion licences are for up to 10 years, and that hardly feels temporary.

These constituents are concerned about a lack of transparency with the AER, the fact that there's no monitoring of fracking in their area. There's a lack of reporting. There are no defined mitigations, and those that exist are not monitored. Municipalities have limited enforcement in this space, Madam Speaker. This bill doesn't say anything about temporary diversion licences or making sure that the good people west of Sundre and Nordegg actually have any kind of guarantee or comfort in knowing that their water is protected. The reality is that the creeks are very low and getting lower every summer, and these rain-fed creeks and tributaries are very important for well water.

This bill does not talk about protecting the headwaters, Madam Speaker, which arguably is probably the most important thing when it comes to water right now. All of our water is coming from glaciers. Not all of it, except in the north. There are some that are not glacial fed. Those glaciers are shrinking, which means that our ability of the ecosystem to provide us water is decreasing year over

year. We need to have a very serious conversation in this province about how we're going to be prepared for the future with less water coming from our glaciers, and how we are managing our headwaters right now is a critical part of that conversation. That is what this bill should have been doing. This bill should have been creating the hard conversations for Albertans to come together to talk about how we meaningfully protect our headwaters.

3:20

There are no commitments to new science or data collection or programs to measure groundwater or surface water to inform management. While I respect that that's not always reflected in legislation, legislation does set the priorities for that work, and that's not here. I know that there are fewer actual water monitoring stations in the headwaters because I talk to people on the ground in rural Alberta, and that is what they're telling me. There's no commitment to improve monitoring or government-source monitoring of water stations or headwaters.

The WPACs are an incredible resource of information, and this bill does nothing to make sure that the great work that they do to create state of the basin reports is actually reflected in on-the-ground decision-making, whether that's happening at the municipal level, the provincial level, or at the private landowner level. These WPACs are supported by the government, Madam Speaker. They exist because the government creates them and partially funds them. They do good work, and their work is not reflected in this act. There's no requirement for it to feed into decision-making. It's a massive gap in our system.

There are no commitments to work with environmental organizations, academics, volunteer groups to reclaim headwaters or restore impacted landscapes. The reality is that there are no commitments to addressing cumulative effects, again. Did you know, Madam Speaker, that Alberta used to have the strongest restoration economy in Canada? Did you know that? It's a very exciting reality that we actually used to pay people, not by government but through private business, to restore our landscapes. We used to have the strongest restoration economy in the country, and we don't anymore. Why? We don't have pieces of legislation that incentivize that kind of innovation and creativity in the private sector to repair and restore our landscapes.

I've talked multiple times in this House, Madam Speaker, about cumulative effects, the need to address cumulative effects. The reality is that we are asking too much of the land and waterscapes across Alberta. This bill is only intensifying those demands on land and waterscapes in the province.

Of course, I appreciate the need to sustain industry. I also appreciate the need to sustain tap water coming out of my tap so that I may drink it. I do think that water is the thing that binds us all. It is the thing that drives our economy. It drives healthy communities. It drives ecosystems and wildlife. It drives all economic sectors, and while this bill does serve some economic sectors, it doesn't necessarily serve all of the people in Alberta who are living on the land every day.

We talked a lot yesterday in Committee of the Whole about First Nations and how inadequate the consultation was with First Nations. The minister cited a list of nations and Métis settlements that she consulted with, and I appreciate that, but if myself and my colleagues are getting letters from First Nations chiefs being upset that they weren't consulted, to me that means that consultation was not effective.

When I think about working with First Nations on water, Madam Speaker, I'm thinking seven generations ahead. What will we be doing with our water now to prepare our children and our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren to live a healthy,

prosperous, beautiful life with beautiful, clean water available to them? I don't think this bill takes us there. This bill is shortsighted. It doesn't really think about the future. It only thinks about right now.

We need to get water back into the soil to improve overall moisture. We can do that with nature-based solutions. We can do that by working together with landowners and industry and citizens to just generally improve the health of our watersheds. We need to enhance ecosystems and their functions, not shy away from that conversation. The truth is that as a conservation biologist and as a landscape ecologist I'm pretty used to having this conversation, Madam Speaker, and trying to convince people to conserve things for the future. Water is life. Without conserving it, we will literally have nothing.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Wright: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise in support of Bill 7. I think that it is certainly needed to modernize our current Water Act. I want to start by thanking the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas for allowing me to chair the Water Advisory Committee, something that started off as drought concerns, and as it evolved, it became an 18-month committee focused on all things water.

I also want to thank the Associate Minister of Water as well. His focus and dedication to making sure some of our driest parts of this province have meaningful access to the water the land needs are wildly important. Thank you to that member for your dedication to making sure our part of the province is seeing the water that we need.

You know, when I chaired the committee, it was made up of urban municipalities, rural municipalities, irrigators, ranchers, industry, Indigenous groups, and environment and water scientists. Every single month we met, they brought a very unique perspective that has helped form some of the feedback that has gone into making this bill. Our water sustains our community, drives our industry, and demands that we manage it responsibly. Shockingly, the rules, however, were found to be inadequate on how we govern our water. That was some of the feedback that we got from folks that came and spoke to the committee and from the committee members themselves. We had some great meetings with folks like the environmental science department at the University of Calgary, who brought a very unique perspective on water management, as well as the folks at Watersmart.

We haven't seen any vital or meaningful updates since 1999, and in that time Alberta's population has grown, our economy has diversified, we have faced droughts, and in my riding we have faced a number of declared states of agricultural disaster. It's a constant reminder for me of just how precious our water is.

One of the documents that we reviewed actually found that while we are responsible for sending 50 per cent of our water to Saskatchewan, upwards of 61 to 69 per cent was actually going by our borders and ending up in our neighbour's backyard. So I appreciate the members opposite bringing forward water storage. I appreciate the members opposite bringing forward beavers. I, too, am in agreement. I, too, love beavers. It is a great resource that we have, whether it's their use of making dams or really good hats.

It's why I think Bill 7 is so important. It provides a forward-looking set of changes to modernize Alberta's water management system. It also lines up with much of the feedback we've received during the 18-month advisory committee.

It's also information that I hear from my constituents on the regular. I have had a number of folks bring forward a number of concerns for on-site storage, and I think that this is a great starting point where we can begin to talk about on-site storage. We can talk about more additional means of storing water on our streams like the South Saskatchewan, whether with a dam or a weir. It's something that I've advocated to all three ministers: the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas, the minister of irrigation, as well as Transportation and Economic Corridors.

This bill will cut red tape, improve transparency, and make sure Albertans can use water efficiently and responsibly both today and for generations to come. I'm really thankful for one of the committee members, Paul McLauchlin, who constantly reminded us that we shouldn't be looking at what water impacts look like five years from now but what water usage in 2080 and 2180 and 2280 will look like in Alberta.

The Water Act amendments serve as a starting point. It served us well for the past decades, but these changes are going to be a starting point for a different and new era. Back then we weren't talking about rainwater harvesting, waste-water reuse, or pressures of growing population and the economy. Now, Madam Speaker, they say hindsight is 20/20. I truly believe that the folks that have come before us in this Chamber should have been looking at those issues, but it gives us a great starting point now. Today's Alberta needs a system that rewards conservation, supports innovation, and gives us the flexibility to respond to changing conditions. During the Water Advisory Committee and through the expanded engagement stakeholders from municipalities and farmers to industry and environmentalists have told us all sorts of important things that went into creating this. Coming from this feedback, the current system is too rigid and too slow. The bill responds directly to some of those concerns. Bill 7 will focus on four key areas: it will streamline processes, improve management and transparency, enable alternative water sources, and allow for very low-risk transfers.

3:30

Right now if a licence holder wants to make a minor change like adjustments to where their water is used on their land, they often need a brand new water licence or transferring to themselves, which is costly, slow, and unnecessary. Under Bill 7 directors will have the authority to approve minor amendments quickly, provided there's no harm to the environment or other users.

We're also making it easier to consolidate multiple licences without losing seniority. This is something farmers and ranchers brought very consistently to the table with feedback through our irrigator member. Farmers have told us that the current rules, which force them to give up seniority allocation, were completely disincentivizing their changes they needed to make on their own property. This change means better efficiency and simpler records without penalizing those who have held the licence for decades.

For those with historic agricultural water usage on publicly owned lands who missed the 2001 regulation deadline, we're reopening that window. This was a clear ask from the Alberta Grazing Leaseholders Association, and it ensures fair treatment for all agricultural users.

Right now only about 1 in 5 licences require water use reporting, and compliance is very low. That's not good enough. Bill 7 gives us the authority to set consistent measurements and reporting requirements all across the basins. Why does this matter? Well, one thing we heard loud and clear through the committee and meeting with stakeholders was that better data allows for better planning, especially in closed basins where new allocations aren't available.

It helps identify transfer opportunities, support compliance during shortages, and address concerns raised by the Auditor General.

We're also introducing transparency on water licence transfers. For the first time Albertans will be able to see what water is being used and what price is being paid for transfers. This increases fairness, clarity, something this government continues to push in all aspects of our environmental policy. Publishing this information will help discipline costs, encourage conservation, and support investment decisions.

Madam Speaker, Albertans are innovators. They want to capture rainwater and reuse treated water to make the most out of every single drop. The current Water Act does not clearly allow that. That's why Bill 7 fixes it. We're defining water for reuse and expanding the definition of water to include precipitation. That means we can create exemptions for rooftop water collection and set policies for stormwater and waste-water reuse. These changes will help reduce pressures on freshwater sources while protecting environmental objectives.

Alberta is the only province that requires a special act of the Legislature for every interbasin transfer, even small, low-risk projects like regional drinking lines. That's not a very effective approach, and many of the Water Advisory Committee stakeholders and board members felt that just the same. Bill 7 introduces criteria for low-risk transfers that can be approved by the minister while keeping high-risk transfers under legislative oversight. These criteria are strict. Transfers must be between adjacent basins, cannot introduce invasive species, must meet environmental standards, and are subject to limits on diversion rates. These changes will save time and money for municipalities and industry near basin boundaries without risking environmental protection.

This is a practical fix. It's a process which stakeholders have called for, and frankly, Madam Speaker, it's something that addresses concerns that stakeholders have called expensive and wasteful.

Let me be clear, Madam Speaker. Alberta's first in time, first in right priority system isn't going anywhere. Licensed allocations will not be reduced. There will be no royalties, no bulk pricing, and no volumetric changes of water. We remain committed to the water for life strategy and its goals. We will continue to manage water for our communities, our economy, and our environmental needs, and any proposed changes for large or high-risk interbasin transfers will still require the approval of this Chamber, just as it does today.

Madam Speaker, I urge all members to support the Water Amendment Act, 2025, so that together we can ensure Alberta's water management system is as strong, flexible, and transparent as the province and people it serves.

Thank you.

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm rising to speak to the bill because I do think it's an important conversation. It's a conversation that I know the minister and I have been having often over the years around water management, the fact that we continuously are seeing more and more drought across the province. Unfortunately, I don't think I will be supporting the bill in the way that it is currently written, mostly because of the feedback that I've been receiving from stakeholders. There seems to be a lot of transfer from what is written in the bill into regulation and not addressing the ongoing questions that a lot of my stakeholders have in regard to how many of these things are going to work. When I speak to them, they would have liked to have seen a lot more legislated and a lot less regulated and a lot less interpretation of what this all means. There's a ton of uncertainty when it comes to this bill.

As the minister indicated, it's been almost 30 years since the Water Act was amended. It is a very complex issue across the province, both from an agricultural perspective, economic diversification, the fact that we have to ensure not only human access but animal welfare components. There is a lot of conversation that is not just specific to water storage, but a lot of that wasn't clarified to the stakeholders that I work with around how many of those questions were going to be addressed. They're nervous, to say the least, around what this is all going to mean.

I think everybody in this room right now can look outside and kind of think: this is extremely weird to be in the middle of November, almost the end of November now, and have no moisture. Except for – sorry – the southern folk, who had snow this weekend and had to drive up from Calgary in it, we haven't really received any moisture. I would say that a couple of weeks ago we got a little bit of ice rain. We had a little bit of moisture this morning. It is extremely rare to not have snow on the ground right now, which is not a very good indicator of what our spring is going to look like.

We've been here before, but I haven't really heard from the government talking about different strategies around how we can manage our water from the north to the south. This bill didn't actually talk about regions. It didn't come up with a regional plan. It didn't look at amending those pieces of legislation, some of which, again, haven't been looked at since the '30s. We have done a ton of investment in the south in irrigation, and obviously the minister is also responsible for dams and reservoirs. We always talk about the south, and we very, very rarely hear anything about the north.

The north is an interesting area because at some points it can actually flood, and then we have massive flooding and our forestry and agriculture industry is significantly impacted by too much water – there's an opportunity there around what we can be doing to help manage some of the water up there – but then it can also have parts of pockets where it's in drought. Like, the Grande Prairie area would be a prime example. It's been known to have way too much moisture, but then last year they didn't have enough, and a lot of crops were failing. It's inconsistent around sort of the dynamic that's happening, yet it's not part of this plan.

And as much as I appreciate the economic potential in the south and the fact that part of the reason why we do so much investment into irrigation is the fact that southern Alberta is a huge economic driver in agri-food – we have specialty crops that generate a ton of economic growth for that region and for the province; we export a ton of material out of that area – there is potential for us to do similar things in northern Alberta that we are just not capitalizing on.

3:40

I think it would be interesting for me to hear from the minister what kind of plans the government is looking at to address some of that water management. When we look at the bill and we talk about the water basin transfers, well, most of that impacts the north, but that's not the only solution to a water management strategy, to all of a sudden look at water basin transfers. There are other opportunities up there.

I think the other thing that's really interesting is that we're hearing conversations around changing forest management agreements to allow for harvesting of forests to create more agriculture land, and I think that that's counter to the long-term land management use plans that are existing up in that area. I've heard lots of concerns that it doesn't appear that there seems to be any type of regional planning happening, and I think that that is a problem because, as the member opposite was saying, well, one of the members of the panel was talking about: we should be thinking about our water, like, 80 years

from now. Well, we also have to look at our land management plans and talk about what we're doing with our land 80 years from now and making sure that everything is making sense.

The biodiversity of our areas relies on ensuring that not only is there water but that we have vegetation and trees and things that are also growing that are ensuring soil health so that our water is able to go where it needs to go and that we're not eroding and creating areas where all of a sudden we have soil eroding away and washing away.

We've seen a lot of this, and my colleague from Banff-Kananaskis would know this better than I do, but when we look at some of the exploration that's happening with the coal industry up in Grassy, the amount of land that is being eroded by water because of the fact that there's been so much exploration done in that area that there's no vegetation left to ensure that we're capturing and the water is going where it needs to go is actually quite devastating. Like, there are literally rivers running down the sides of Grassy that shouldn't be where they are because of the fact that water isn't being captured by the trees and the vegetation and all of the things in that region.

To say that we're going to introduce one piece of legislation directly related to water but not address the whole ecosystem, I think, is actually part of the failure of this piece of legislation. It would have made more sense to have the water bill introduced with a really great land-use plan and some really great economic diversification planning and some regional planning around what we're doing so that everything is working together.

The other piece that I've been hearing even from municipalities is that municipalities have to share their water licences with each other, and when water is really scarce, it becomes even more of a contentious issue to negotiate those conversations between different regions. Some will say, "Well, I need more water because we want to look at more economic diversification," and some of these areas are very water dependent, depending on what you're looking at to diversify.

Then at the same time, I mean, we can go back and just look at southern Alberta again. Pincher Creek had no water, like, two years ago – two years ago? Three years ago? Man, time flies – to the point where they were having to keep drilling because there was literally nothing left and the whole region was in a massive drought. The Oldman was really low. I think at that point, too, the St. Mary dam collapsed. So we had a whole bunch of water issues going on in the south, but at the same time the region was talking about economic diversification and trying to attract more value-added processing into the region, which requires a ton of water.

Like, there didn't seem to be a very united conversation happening around what the priorities were, how we are managing these things, and it created a lot of questions, which was part of the reason why this panel was created and these consultations had to happen. But those questions still exist, and I'm hearing them even as recently as last week at RMA, talking about: how do we balance between human necessity, animal welfare, and then economic diversification and value-add? Nobody knows because it's all going to be in regulation.

I think there are gaps, especially when it comes to water, where it starts to get really contentious as we see more drought. The clarity is the most important piece, and because the stakeholders that I'm talking to are saying, "We haven't really been consulted on reg," I think there's a gap and that is part of the problem.

I will say, too – I don't think I have very much time left – because I have the opportunity to stand and speak for a little bit, that I'm really encouraging the government to start coming forward now on our plan for the spring and the summer. Obviously, I was the critic

for the minister of forestry for a while and worked really closely with our wildland firefighters. We need to be hiring them and talking to them now. If it continues the way that it continues, we are going to have massive fires again. I hope it rains because I don't want to see what we saw a couple of years ago, but we weren't prepared a couple of years ago. We have an opportunity to look at what's going on today and be, like: we haven't had any moisture. Everybody should be worried that we haven't had any moisture, and people are talking to me about it. It's supposed to be just super cold and not a lot of – like, minus 50 with no moisture. It sounds like a great winter. I know, I might have to go somewhere else.

We need to be forecasting and preparing our first responders and our wildland firefighters and training them and making sure we have enough and that we have enough equipment and that we have all of the things prepared to go. You know what? If we don't need them, it's better to be prepared. I would hate to see us at another point like we were, where we were rushing people out of training that weren't getting all of their training done. It's literally what happened a couple of years ago. I know this. I've done tons of WCB work with wildland firefighters that were sent out into the field, that didn't finish all of their training because we didn't have time for them to get it all done. Unfortunately, we had a loss; we had someone who died because we weren't preparing people fast enough.

So as much as this conversation around the water bill is super important, the people that work for us, that work to protect our communities during wildfires, are far more important to me. I wanted to make sure that the government is being prepared and being proactive and getting ready for what could potentially start being a wildfire season. We all know this, too; like, there are fires burning right now because they don't really go out. They just live underground. They will flare, and we will have to manage them. I just want to make sure that we're prepared for it.

The government should be getting ready and making sure that this conversation is live and that that prep is getting done because, as they all know, I'll probably start asking them about it soon, and it would be great to have some answers and to make sure that our wildland firefighters are being supported by the government, that they're not being rushed through training, that their equipment is certified and ready and clean and all of the things, and that we have a really good plan come spring.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today in strong support of Bill 7, the Water Amendment Act, 2025. In my constituency of Lacombe-Ponoka water isn't just a resource; it's the lifeblood of our farms, of our communities, and our way of life. We measure it in inches of rain or maybe in the level of a dugout or the health of our local rivers. When you've lived through dry years, as we are now, you understand that every drop counts. This bill is about making sure that Alberta manages this precious resource with foresight, with fairness, and common sense.

3:50

The Water Act has served Alberta well for a quarter century, as we've heard many times in this Chamber, but it hasn't been meaningfully updated since 1999. In that time, our province has grown by over a million people, our economy has diversified, and we've seen years where water scarcity has put real pressure on farms, on ranches, and municipalities. The old rules were built for a different era. Bill 7 doesn't tear down that foundation; it strengthens it while still modernizing the system for today's realities.

To be clear, the principle of first in time, first in right remains untouched. Licensed allocations will not be reduced. There will be no royalties, no bulk pricing, and no surprise conditions, as we've already heard, that are slapped on older licences. The backbone of Alberta's water rights system stays in place.

What changes are the tools that we use to manage water, tools that make the system more transparent, more efficient, and better suited to conservation. Bill 7 introduces practical definitions like "return flow" and "water for reuse," which I will touch on later. It broadens the definition of water to include precipitation intercepted above ground. Madam Speaker, this matters because it opens the door to smart policies like exempting rooftop rainwater collection from licensing so that municipalities, farms, and businesses can put that water to work without red tape. In a dry year those extra gallons can make the difference between a crop and a loss. Right now too much good water goes to waste because our legislation hasn't kept pace with technology.

Bill 7 allows licensees to supply water for reuse where it benefits the environment. Think about a food processor that can clean and repurpose that water, like Doef's Greenhouses in Lacombe county or a municipality that can use captured stormwater for irrigation. This isn't theory; it's practical stewardship. We're making more efficient use of the same drop while protecting downstream rights and aquatic ecosystems.

Albertans expect fairness and openness. Bill 7 requires disclosure of agreements tied to temporary assignments, transfers, and licences. It gives the director authority within regulations to make public the terms of those agreements. That means no backroom deals, no guessing. Sunlight builds trust and helps users make informed decisions about investing in technology or pursuing transfers.

If you've ever tried to amend a licence for a minor change, you know the frustration of waiting months for an answer. Bill 7 sets mandatory timelines for application reviews and limits unnecessary requests for additional information. It simplifies minor amendments and allows an amalgamation of licences while preserving original allocations and priority numbers. This is about predictability so that farmers, ranchers, and businesses can plan ahead instead of waiting on bureaucracy.

To be crystal clear, this bill does not open the floodgates. Transfers between major river basins still require legislative approval except in emergencies. What Bill 7 adds is a framework for lower risk transfers between adjacent basins under strict conditions for smaller diversion limits, for invasive species safeguards, and ministerial oversight. That is rural pragmatism: fix what's reasonable to fix and keep strong guardrails everywhere else.

When moisture is scarce, you plant every acre around the water you have, not the water you wish you had. A more predictable, transparent, and flexible system helps producers manage risk. If a rancher can reuse processed water or capture rooftop rain without an administrative maze, well, that's real value. If timelines are firm and expectations are clear, people can invest in better irrigation or adopt new conservation technologies. These changes don't just sound good in Edmonton. They make sense in Clive, in Alix, in Mirror, in Gull Lake, and every rural community in Alberta that faces the imminent risk and reality of a dry year.

The water for life strategy remains in place. We continue to rely on environmental objectives to sustain ecosystem health and meet transboundary obligations. By integrating rainwater, stormwater, and reuse streams into the management tool box and by requiring consistent measurement and reporting, we protect the environment while unlocking efficiency gains. This is not a trade-

off; it's a win-win that reflects Alberta's tradition of practical conservation.

Madam Speaker, this is careful work, and the ministry is proceeding in that spirit. On that note, I applaud and thank our Minister of Environment and Protected Areas and her team for the hard work that they have done in consulting Albertans and identifying gaps and building regulations that make sense before implementation. Bill 7 gives us the legislative framework. The regulations will put muscle on those bones. That stepwise approach means that we keep talking to farmers, to municipalities, to Indigenous communities, and to industry to make sure the rules fit the land and the people who live on it.

I'll close where I began: water is life. We've heard it many times. We believe this on this side of the House as well. Bill 7 respects the habits that have served us well: priority rights, property rights, and environmental stewardship. It trims bureaucracy where it's thick, it adds transparency where it's thin, and it opens the door to practical reuse of a resource we can't afford to waste. It's forward looking without forgetting where we came from. It's balanced, it's workable, and it's built for the Alberta we live in today. For the sake of our farms, our towns, our industries, and the rivers that tie them all together, I urge all members to support Bill 7. Let's manage water with the same common sense we bring to everyday life – measure twice; cut once – and let's make sure that every drop counts.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Member Miyashiro: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to begin today with a letter sent to me by someone who has concerns about Bill 7.

I've been reading a lot about Bill 7, the water amendment act and [I] want to express my concern about this Bill and the implications.

As I lived and worked on the banks of the Slave River for many years, I know how special this watershed is, and already . . . impacted by development and regulation. The merging of the Peace/Slave and Athabasca watersheds and ability to transfer between basins is giving a blank cheque to industry to continue to use and abuse within whatever basin they wish, knowing they can bring volumes of water from elsewhere. This is just wrong. Now living on the banks of the Oldman, I see how fragile our watershed is and do not want further mismanagement to happen just because we could pipe in water from elsewhere. It's just not right. We need to manage the resources we have and not rob Peter to pay Paul.

Madam Speaker, as many people have said today, water is not just a resource; it's a living system. It carries life but can also carry risk.

You know, having spent my entire life in southern Alberta, I fully support the intent to modernize Alberta's Water Act. I appreciate the potential benefits for our irrigation system and the importance of irrigation to support Canada's premier food corridor, a collaborative network committed to driving growth in southern Alberta's agrifood sector. However, I have serious concerns regarding this bill's approach to environmental health governance and the rights of Indigenous and municipal stakeholders and the inability and unwillingness of the bill's author to consider improvements or amendments to the legislation as well as a lack of full consultation with First Nations, municipalities, and watershed stakeholders.

This government voted down two amendments authored by the Member for Banff-Kananaskis, a noted biologist and recognized environmentalist, a term which has never been

ascribed to Bill 7's author. The first amendment asked to stop the merger of the Peace and Slave River basins with the Athabasca River basin and the creation of a new basin. They asked for it to prevent risk of ecological damage and to address, again, calls from First Nations, Métis, and the public for a full consultation on this proposal.

The second amendment proposed to replace the minister and director's opinion to issue a low-risk water transfer with evidence-informed criteria based on the best available aquatic science. The thresholds are based on cumulative impacts of any lower risk water transfer, existing water licences and water allocations, and in-stream flow rates. It also required consultation with First Nations and Métis settlements and with subject-matter experts and the public before issuing a low-risk water transfer and required regular water monitoring. However, as I stated earlier, the UCP MLAs' stubbornness and partisanship ruled the day, and they defeated these very helpful and nonpartisan amendments. Science- and evidence-informed decision-making? Full consultation with stakeholders? Move along; nothing to see here, folks.

[The Acting Speaker in the chair]

You know, the second amendment also addressed the fact that Bill 7 centralizes authority in ways that weaken democratic oversight. As I said earlier, it gives expanded powers to the director and the minister to authorize interbasin water transfers. As I've said before, Chief Troy Knowlton of the Piikani Nation has warned that such changes erode community trust and accountability, and we must ensure that water governance remains transparent and democratic.

4:00

There's also the issue, Mr. Speaker, about costs, which is not addressed in this legislation. Who's going to pay for this when someone wants transfers? We're going to expect the water users and the proponents of the transfers to come up with the money when most municipalities that would require this don't have money for infrastructure as it is. The government is putting the rules in place to say, "You can do this," but they're not putting the supports in place to actually have it done. It kind of reminds us of, oh, the school assessment and numeracy stuff, doesn't it?

Mr. Speaker, I think at this point we've heard enough. We've heard the facts that this government doesn't want to listen to good ideas. We're not opposed to the idea of modernizing this legislation. What we're opposed to is this government not willing to listen to experts, this government not willing to consult with First Nations and watershed stakeholders. So why don't we do this: why don't we just bring it back and work with the stakeholders to strengthen the bill so that it's acceptable to everyone, so it's effective for everyone, and do it before it becomes law? Protect Alberta's water for generations to come, and don't do the short sighted and rush it through.

With that, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 10

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

[Adjourned debate November 25: Mr. Williams]

The Acting Speaker: Okay. The next to speak on this is Edmonton-Gold Bar. Go ahead.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and offer a few comments on Bill 10. Now, this bill makes three changes that I want to discuss in my time today. One, it amends the Government Organization Act and the Traffic Safety Act to allow drivers' licences to carry citizenship markers. It also forces Albertans to produce ID to receive government services. Those are two new things that this bill introduces. The second thing that I want to address is the amendment that it makes to the Livestock Industry Diversification Act to allow elk hunting on elk farms, and the third thing that I want to address is the amendments to the Fair Registration Practices Act to prohibit regulatory bodies from requiring Canadian work experience.

Now, with respect to the citizenship markers, Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of concerns around the changes that this makes requiring IDs now to identify whether or not the holder of that ID is a Canadian citizen. I had an exchange with my friend from Edmonton-Glenora a few weeks ago. She was attending a citizenship ceremony in her riding and was asking whether any of us in the NDP caucus had family or friends who had immigrated to Canada from other countries. I have a number of great-grandparents who moved to Canada from different countries, and that's how our family ended up living in Canada. It was just curious. You know, just reflecting on that made me look at how the citizenship requirements, the paths to residency in Canada, have changed over time.

My great-grandparents moved to southern Saskatchewan at around the turn of the 20th century, so the early 1900s. I don't know exactly when, Mr. Speaker; I haven't actually delved that deeply into my family history. At the time that they moved to southern Saskatchewan, they only had to do two things. They had to come up with \$10 to buy 160 acres of land, and they had to build a fence around that 160 acres of land. That's it. If they could pay for the land and build a fence around it, they were granted citizenship as a matter of course.

You know, being the geek that I am, Mr. Speaker, I even ran the number \$10 through the inflation calculator. How much is \$10 in 1900 worth today? It's about \$280. You know, \$280 for 160 acres – forgive me; I think that's 64 hectares of land – even in southern Saskatchewan that is a low price. You would pay probably \$1,900 an acre in southern Saskatchewan for an equivalent piece of land today. So extremely cheap, extremely easy to come to Canada.

My great-grandparents didn't have to demonstrate that they spoke English. In fact, I assume that none of them did. One of them came from somewhere in eastern Europe. We know that the boundaries of eastern Europe countries changed dramatically in the early 19th century, so I don't even know what country he was born in, but I assume that he didn't speak English. One of my great-grandfathers came from the great state of Illinois in the United States, and I can guarantee you that he didn't speak English, at least not the way it should be spoken, Mr. Speaker. Not only did they not have to prove that they could speak English or French; they didn't have to have any Canadian work experience. They didn't have to have any skills other than the ability to buy 160 acres of land and build a fence around it. They didn't have to be refugees. They didn't even have to have family or friends who were willing to sponsor them to come to the country. All of those things are now requirements for people who want to seek permanent residency in Canada.

In fact, I was looking at the Canadian immigration website today. To apply to be a skilled worker in Canada, you need \$1,500 just to file your application, so seven times the cost to buy 160 acres of land 120 years ago just to file the application, no guarantee that anybody will even look at it, much less have it approved. You

know, I just want people to keep these things in mind when they question whether or not the people who move to Canada are worthy of being here because the requirements for becoming a Canadian are so much more stringent than they were 120 years ago, when my great-grandparents moved to this country. I think that we need to keep in mind that we require so much more of people who are permanent residents than we used to and that the people who come to this country and are legally allowed to live here absolutely deserve to be residents here. They have the skills, they have the competency, they have the will, and we need to treat them with the respect that they deserve.

I'm really afraid that putting the citizenship markers on government IDs will take away that respect. You know, I talk to people all the time, and there are certainly a lot of people who regard permanent residents or noncitizens of our country as less than those who are citizens. I think a lot of people have forgotten their own family histories and don't realize, if you've been a third- or fourth-generation Canadian like me, that coming to Canada was much easier 120 years ago than it is today. I certainly hope that people remember that and that we need to treat permanent residents with the respect that they deserve.

4:10

I'm concerned that the government is moving towards treating permanent residents with disrespect and disdain and that's why they're amending the Government Organization Act to require people to produce IDs when they apply for and receive government services. Now, the bill doesn't actually say what government services they'll have to produce ID to receive, so we can only question: will it be to get health care? Will it be to enrol themselves or their children in the local schools? Will it be to even apply to purchase a house or a piece of land through the land titles or to seek redress from a landlord through the landlord and tenancy board, to apply for a job: all of these things? I also ask: what other types of discrimination are we opening people to who have permanent resident listed on their IDs, Mr. Speaker?

You know, a few weeks ago I had the opportunity to travel to Texas, and it was hot. I don't know why people choose to live in Texas; the heat is unbearable there. I certainly don't envy them.

We were going out to Texas. I made a rare visit to a bar, and before we were allowed to go into the bar, the bouncer at the door asked to see my ID. When we produced it . . . [interjection] Okay. All right. Point of order, Mr. Speaker. No; I'm just kidding. The Member for Calgary-Currie is laughing at the suggestion that somebody would want to see my ID to be admitted . . . [interjection] Yeah. The legal drinking age, just for the House's knowledge, in Texas is 45 years old, so I'm right on the cusp. No; I'm sure the bouncer was just humouring me when he asked for my ID. But when he saw that I was from Canada, he gently made fun of my accent and where I came from but let me into the bar.

What I'm really afraid of, though, Mr. Speaker, is that when permanent residents are asked to produce their IDs to go into bars or clubs here in Edmonton, they're going to get much more hostile treatment than just playful ribbing for where they happen to come from. I'm really afraid that a permanent resident will be denied entry to a bar or club based on a citizenship marker that's indicated on their ID. It could happen at other places, too.

You know, many times when we go to liquor stores or buy cigarettes, we're asked to produce identification to show that we're eligible to purchase those products. Well, what will happen if the person who operates those stores just doesn't feel like selling liquor or cigarettes to a permanent resident? What redress will they have? They won't. They will just have to put up with those minor acts of

discrimination because there will be no process for them to make an appeal or seek any kind of fair treatment from people who just decide not to serve somebody because: looks to me like you don't deserve to be served here; please move on. That's what I'm really afraid is going to happen.

What I'm really afraid will happen is that some people with even more authority than the people who run liquor stores or cigarettes or bars or clubs will use that authority inappropriately against people who are just permanent residents and not Canadian citizens. I'm thinking in particular about police. You know, every time we're pulled over by a police officer, we're asked to produce our identification. I'm just wondering if police will give extra scrutiny to people who show that they are permanent residents on their ID. Maybe they'll be held to account for – I don't know – a tail light missing or licence plate not screwed on right, subject to that kind of harassment that maybe a Canadian citizen wouldn't be subject to, because of the marker on their identification.

For those reasons, I certainly hope that members of this House vote to reject this bill. Permanent residents deserve to be here, and they deserve to be treated with the dignity and respect that everybody else is afforded here in this country.

With the time remaining I want to make a couple of comments about the changes to the livestock diversification act and the fair practices act. With respect to the livestock diversification act, Mr. Speaker, this bill allows for the hunting of elk on elk farms. [interjection] I hear the minister of transportation cheering that on. I assume that he's not a very good hunter, so the only way he can shoot anything is if it's caged into an area that's small enough for him to be able to track it down and shoot it.

An Hon. Member: Fish in a barrel.

Mr. Schmidt: So, yeah, like shooting fish in a barrel. All we're arguing now about is how big the barrel is, right?

It is absolutely immoral to shoot animals in cages. Nobody would regard that as a fair and ethical treatment of animals. All we're discussing is how big that cage can be. That reason alone, I think, is enough to reject these changes to the livestock diversification act. It's an immoral hunting practice that is being introduced to Alberta.

More importantly from a biological standpoint, this will also increase the spread of chronic wasting disease in Alberta. We know that chronic wasting disease increases in other parts of the world where these hunting preserves are in place, and that problem will continue to grow here in Alberta once these elk hunting farms are allowed to operate.

The final thing that I want to address is the fair practices act, Mr. Speaker. I know that our side is in favour of this, but I do want to highlight one concern, and that is the ministerial approval of prohibited requirement. What the large print giveth the small print may taketh away in this case, and I am really concerned that regulatory bodies will be approaching the minister with a whole bunch of exceptions that they'll be demanding for Canadian requirements.

I don't know. Maybe the accountants will say that you need to have demonstrated proficiency with dealing with the Canadian tax code before you can be considered for licensure, and the minister might say yes. Then – I don't know – the architects will have to say: well, you have to demonstrate a competency in dealing with building buildings in cold regions. [interjection] Yeah, exactly. Thank you to my friend from Calgary-Elbow for that.

You know, regulatory bodies are incredibly creative. I'm concerned that the minister will end up blowing a bunch of loopholes into this practice, so I urge all members to vote against this.

The Acting Speaker: Are there others that would like to speak to second reading of Bill 10? The Member for Edmonton-Decore. Go ahead.

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to stand here today in this Chamber in my home province of Alberta, a province that is built on hard work, resilience, and the contributions of people from every corner of this world. As an immigrant, this is a province that never failed me whatsoever. I was once a noncitizen. At some point nothing differentiated me from the rest except the right to vote.

This is a place where people come to build a better life, Mr. Speaker, where diversity is not just a word but a strength that fuels our economy and enriches our communities. The decisions we make here, the decisions about fairness, the decisions about access to opportunities matter so much for so many people. These decisions shape the lives not only of the individuals but the lives of the future of this province.

I want to talk about two things in Bill 10, a very, very small progress that deserves recognition and policies which are buried in this bill that divide us as Albertans.

4:20

Let's start with the progress that I see in Bill 10, removing Canadian work experience requirements for credentialling processes. I have to underscore, Mr. Speaker, that this does not go far enough, but it is one good step forward. Removing work experience for job opportunities was the first step that we needed to take on my motion last year, Motion 511, but the government amended the motion to remove experience for credentialling purposes only. Other provinces have taken steps to remove Canadian work experience for job opportunities. Two years ago Ontario passed legislation, B.C. passed legislation that removed those barriers. Sadly, Alberta has not gone that far to recognize the need for many Albertans who are in jobs that they are overqualified for because the situation forces them to be in those jobs.

In fact, as a province we have the highest number of individuals that are in jobs that they are overqualified for compared to the rest of the country. We wanted the government to take steps to address those barriers. Sadly, that did not happen in Motion 511.

Think about what this means. For years newcomers have arrived in Alberta with skills, with degrees, with professions, with experience. These are often critical opportunities, critical experiences, critical credentials that we need, like health care, engineering, technology, but they are always told that their experience doesn't count because it was not gained in Canada. That barrier has forced many to take jobs far below their qualifications, struggling to make ends meet while their talents go unused. Economically it is a loss for our province.

On this side of the House we have been advocating for a change on this issue for a long, long, long time. The UCP government is spending a lot of time in terms of creating committee after committee for credential recognition without taking the necessary steps to address the underlying problems that prohibit people from being in the professions they were trained on and where they would love to work. Mr. Speaker, newcomers deserve the chance to contribute fully to our economy and our community.

On the citizenship marker, which is also in Bill 10 – the first time that I saw that the bill has two components I said: why has this been put together under the name of red tape reduction? Putting a citizenship marker on the licence as red tape reduction is something I really, really don't understand. It would be great if the minister could explain how that reduces red tape there. Having heard the minister's speech, I would love to learn that.

This is unnecessary. It sends the wrong message. All Albertans, regardless of where they were born, deserve respect. They deserve recognition for their contributions to this province. Other than voting there are no programs in Alberta that are exclusively for Canadian citizens, so why do we introduce this marker on the driver's licence? What services are we trying to unconstitutionally restrict from Albertans?

Personal story, Mr. Speaker: my wife was a Canadian-government sponsored refugee that first landed in Ontario. She only stayed in Ontario for two weeks. She chose to live in Alberta. She started working in her second month and paying taxes in her second month.

So fast-forward. When I was working in the provincial government, there was a colleague of mine who was two years old when she came to the country as a refugee from Vietnam, the boat people. She told me that she was going to the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers one day, and I said: what's happening there? It's a profound story, Mr. Speaker. She told me that she was sponsored by the Canadian government, her and her family, when she was two years old. She came and she built her life here, and she said she wants to give back, so she was sponsoring a Syrian refugee in 2015, when Syrians were going through a very, very difficult period of time.

I shared this story with my wife. She said: why don't I also do the same? We ended up sponsoring a refugee family. They have an eight-year-old. They live with us. The eight-year-old is a PR. The mom and the dad are learning English. She goes to grade 3 now.

When this came and there was a signal of restricting some of the government services – the eight-year-old: her name is Yasmin – I thought about Yasmin. Will she be accessing services? Will she be able to get to the education that she deserves? The decisions that we are making and the signals that we are sending already sent some shockwaves to those who are trying to start their life here, Mr. Speaker. When she goes to medical services, because it doesn't show citizenship, what happens? The family is still not on their feet because many go through that first step in life when they land here, and there are Canadian taxpayers, Alberta taxpayers that support to build a community in this province.

So during that period of time what services are we restricting? It doesn't benefit us. It only harms us. You're not fast-tracking those individuals to navigate, integrate, and contribute. Holding them back doesn't help by any means. Imagine what this marker could mean in practice. A citizenship ID could lead to unequal treatment. And when we send signals of a two-tiered population based on the markers that we create, we are actually creating a narrative that there are two tiers of populations.

4:30

Let me go back to the story of Yasmin and her parents. When they are asking for a job or submit a resume and they are asked to send in their ID and they either e-mail or fax and the ID card doesn't show that, will they be deprioritized for jobs? I'm thinking about that. If they don't, I will still have to sponsor them and support them.

The marker on the driver's licence, Mr. Speaker, is something that divides us. It creates two tiers of community. It will create a narrative that makes noncitizens struggle with jobs. It creates a narrative of noncitizens going through discriminatory practices, which doesn't build a sense of community and a sense of a province that we have all benefited from.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any others who would like to speak to second reading of Bill 10? The Member for St. Albert. Go ahead.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 10, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2). I'm just going to add a few comments to some of the things that my colleagues have noted. You know, some of the high-level concerns or talking points, I guess, are that Bill 10 actually hides a number of measures that actually can be quite detrimental and harmful to people's lives while blending them with some things that are sort of innocent fixes that should have been done, that should be done on a regular basis. I'll get into that in a little bit. This is really a pattern.

A habit for this government is to pass these giant bills. We call them omnibus. I mean, there's really no strict definition of what an omnibus is. There isn't sort of a registry where you can say: how many passed in this many years? They tend to be these bills that cover lots of different pieces of legislation. What we've seen the pattern being, Mr. Speaker, is that, you know, we'll see a number of really innocent things that need to happen, that must happen, that we want to vote for mixed in with pieces that are actually quite dangerous. The fact that this government relies so heavily on this type of legislation leads me to believe that this is just one more activity, one more tool that they use to continuously sort of chip away at democracy. I'll get into that in a bit.

Obviously, there are a number of good things in this bill. As I said, Bill 10 is an omnibus bill that amends six pieces of legislation across various ministries, and those are the All-season Resorts Act, Fair Registration Practices Act, Government Organization Act, Traffic Safety Act, Land Agents Licensing Act, and then, of course, changes to the Livestock Industry Diversification Act. What do they have in common, you might ask? I don't know. I think it was just that whoever was in the room at the time decided they need some cover and camouflage for things that weren't that popular or that weren't going to be so popular with the Alberta public.

Now, this government, as I said, relies heavily on red tape reduction. There are things that we can always be changing and updating. I mean, it was only a couple of years ago, I think, that some of the processes, even for some of the social service benefits, required a fax machine. That's a bit dated, but that was a fact. That was something that the government of Alberta required people to do, to fax in pay stubs. That no longer is the case. Thankfully, we're continuing to update. Those are the kinds of things that I would expect to see in a piece of legislation like this, that has everything but the kitchen sink in it. Take care of, you know, the housekeeping stuff that we need to update, but don't throw in things that are going to potentially harm people.

The real problem here is that we get these massive pieces of legislation. We don't have time to debate them. They're just completed camouflaged. Then we vote on it, and off we go. Not to mention the fact that this government has a pattern, a very clear pattern, of reducing the amount of time that we have to debate, whether that is shortening the legislative session, whether that is shortening the amount of time that we debate at each stage of debate. We've seen that over and over again. I mean, I certainly don't have the stats, but I would suggest that this is increasing. I think the more pressure that this government is feeling from the Alberta public, the more willing they are to do everything they can to get the heck out of here and stop debating their very unpopular bills.

I mean, there are currently 87 of us that are elected to sit in this place and to represent the people that sent us here, and I would expect that all 87 of us have an opportunity to speak at each piece of legislation, to actually take the information back to our constituents, talk to them about what the changes are and get their feedback, or consult with experts. Most of the time when we're

seeing pieces of legislation, most of us aren't experts in the content that we see or the material that is put in front of us, so we do lean heavily on people that do have the expertise in our communities. What this government does is reduce the amount of time that we even have to do that.

So they have these massive pieces of legislation: fire everything that you can in there – good, bad, and ugly – jam it through, ram it through, do this again and again and again, and call it a day. That is a slow, slow dripping – not death, but it's just a reduction of the strength of the democracy of this place, and it's been, actually, quite difficult to watch. What's really encouraging, though, Mr. Speaker, is that Albertans are catching on and they also see this.

Now, here's the other thing about red tape reduction that I find kind of ridiculous. You know, they give themselves awards. I don't know if you caught any of that, Mr. Speaker. They actually give themselves red tape reduction awards. They give themselves, like: you got 96 per cent on reducing this kind of red tape, and it's awesome. You know, they don't list it. They won't tell you if any lives were saved. They won't tell you how much money was saved. They won't tell you how many environmental protections were strengthened, but: "Damn, that was good. We all get stickers. We did a great job reducing red tape." And then they continue to fire out these bills again and again and again, throw everything but the kitchen sink in, and say: "Look at us. Aren't we great?" None of us get to debate and we don't get to pull out the threads that are really important to talk about, and democracy dies. And that's continuing. This is a pattern of this government.

You know, I was curious to see since this UCP formed government: how many red tape reduction or omnibus bills have we seen? I didn't really know, Mr. Speaker, and there really isn't an index available for us to say how many we have seen. Just in a quick search I saw some going back to 2019. See if you can find a pattern with me.

Bill 20, Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2019: another big budget and tax bill that ended tax cuts and changed a bunch of benefits. We saw that right in 2019, right after this government formed government. The first piece of legislation that we saw was, of course, an omnibus bill, and one of the first things they did, Mr. Speaker, was start to blow up AISH, one of the programs that this government has had their eye on for quite some time. It's not about making life better for people with disabilities. It's not really even about them finding jobs, like they like to tell you it is. They're blowing up AISH only so, you know, 80,000 severely disabled people can find jobs, because they wouldn't have. You know, it's just astounding to me. I'm not even going to get into that. Just stop.

Bill 21. Here's another one; 2019. That was the first bill we saw. They took out the eligibility definition for AISH recipients, and they moved it into regulation so they could do the damage that we're starting to see today, and we'll talk further about that when we talk about Bill 12. Bill 21, Ensuring Fiscal Sustainability Act, 2019: another package of fiscal program changes, amending multiple statutes and introducing the Public Sector Employers Act. Again, there were some good things in there, Mr. Speaker; most of them not so good. What this government did was hide the things that they didn't want Albertans to see and the things they didn't want us debating on.

Bill 22, Reform of Agencies, Boards and Commissions and Government Enterprises Act, 2019: another bill that repealed and restructured ABCs. Now, you might think: well, what's the big deal about agencies, boards, and commissions? We have hundreds of them. I don't know if you've ever looked at the list of agencies, boards, and commissions in Alberta. It's wild. There's, like, a commission for pretty much everything from horse racing to – I

don't know. Shout one out, would you? Somebody? Anybody? [interjections] What's that? Anyway, they'll think of some. There are lots of them.

4:40

An Hon. Member: Well, there's insurance, crop insurance.

Ms Renaud: Oh, there's insurance. Oh, my gosh, there are tons of them.

Member Eremenko: AGLC.

Ms Renaud: AGLC is one. There are so many of them, right? People get appointed. Lots of times friendlies get appointed, right? Failed candidates get appointed. All kinds of things like that. It's: hello; here's a job for you. That happens.

We saw all this reform shoved into an omnibus bill. What that does not allow us to do is to pull out all of the pieces that should concern Albertans. Contrary to what this government thinks, our job is actually to critique the legislation. That's our job. That's what we're sent here to do; not for long, but it'll – anyway. They sent us here to do those things, and this government is not allowing us to do that in a number of ways.

We go on. We see Bill 30, a health statutes amendment. Seems to me we're going to see another one of those. Red tape reduction in 2019, 25; 62, Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021. In 2025 we see another host of red tape reduction. Now, that seems kind of weird, that we have so much red tape in this province that we consistently have to bring in legislation to address red tape. I don't know. Is this government so completely incompetent that they just can't take care of red tape? Why is it they have to keep bringing in this legislation to bring all of these other pieces of legislation in when, really, they should be focusing on the things that need to be updated and removed?

Not just that; the most important piece of that, Mr. Speaker, is that they need to report back to Albertans. Now, they'll tell you: oh, yeah; we did 85 per cent, 90 per cent, 70 per cent reduction here, 37 here. They have all these numbers that don't actually make any sense whatsoever except to the minister and his little friends over there. They don't actually mean anything to Albertans. What we would like to see: tell us all of the areas that they were removed and what the result was. How did that make life better for anybody? How?

I'm going to give you an example of, you know, one of the things – and red tape can be, again, very innocent, changing some rules that are really outdated, that really do need to be changed, but it could also weaken any kind of authority to oversee or to provide oversight. One of the things that happened this week, and I think you heard a little bit in question period earlier today, is that one of the things that we saw was that there is a new – it's called the Recovery Training Institute of Alberta. Now, one of the things that the Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction is doing is creating space for more recovery coaches. Now, certainly, there is room in the system or the programs to bring in that expertise to coach people along their recovery journey. I'm certainly not debating that at all.

However, there is this new recovery institute that is part of a package of granting that this group has received from the government of Alberta. Now, let's be clear. They only really formed their company a few months before they got the grants, but you know, that must be a coincidence, for sure. On this recovery institute of Alberta, one of the great questions that was asked in Public Accounts is: "Tell me about this accreditation. What do they get when they finish? What kind of oversight is there? How do we

know this is working? It's a great idea. It sounds really good on paper. It makes sense. What do they get?" Well, nothing.

Nothing, Mr. Speaker. There is nothing. There's no oversight. We have no information. We have no details. Just trust us. That is the kind of legislation that we see. That is the kind of degraded oversight that we have seen over the last six years, almost seven years, with this government, and the pattern continues. I mean, don't be surprised. This is not going to be the last red tape reduction bill that we're going to see, because this is how they like to do it, camouflage.

Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of problems with this kind of legislation, and some of my colleagues have done a really great job sort of pulling out a few pieces, which is always so difficult with these kinds of legislation.

Can I get a time check, Mr. Speaker? Sorry.

The Acting Speaker: Two and a half minutes left.

Ms Renaud: Sorry?

The Acting Speaker: Two and a half.

Ms Renaud: Thank you very much.

There are a lot of problems with this kind of legislation. What it does is that it does lean heavily on just sort of eroding democracy, as I said. It leans heavily on confusion. If I were to say to somebody, a constituent of mine, "Oh, yeah, it's in Bill 9 or 10; it's in the red tape reduction bill," they're not going to have any idea that we're talking about, you know, shooting animals on a farm or putting a marker on your driver's licence. They're not going to have any idea whatsoever. They're going to think: "Red tape reduction? What is it, like getting rid of a fax machine or something, or updating a plan for something?" They don't understand the kind of damage that is going on and the kind of changes that are going on under the guise of: we're making life better by reducing red tape.

I think all of us can agree that red tape has kind of a negative connotation. We think of red tape, and we think of barriers that are put in front of us. Unfortunately, what this government has chosen to do is use that vehicle to make some really dangerous changes. Not only does that continue to erode democracy; they also cram dozens of unrelated changes into one package, making meaningful scrutiny almost impossible.

Again, as I mentioned earlier, this government has systematically, deliberately, on purpose cut the sitting days that we have. They have cut our time for debate, and they have actually eroded the clarity of the legislation as they continue to rely on this type of bill that does nothing but cloud what they're actually trying to do. But I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that that aligns perfectly with the behaviour that we've seen from this government. They are all about hiding. They are all about obfuscating, like: "Look over here. Oh, look. Hey, fancy new licence plate. Don't be upset about health care. We have a licence plate. It'll be awesome."

So a lot of dangerous changes happen under the guise of red tape reduction, and it is unfortunate that this government has so little respect for all of our constituents who sent us here to do the good work, and that is to pull these pieces of legislation apart, to have the time to fully debate them, and to consult back with our constituents to find out what they actually think about the bills. We don't have time to do that – not at all, Mr. Speaker – and that is the kind of erosion that I am against.

Thank you very much. I'll take my seat.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others that would like to speak to second reading on Bill 10? The Member for Edmonton-Meadows. Go ahead.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in this House to add my comments to Bill 10, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2). I'd actually like to note in the beginning that I do oppose this bill. There are a number of reasons, and they are very strong reasons, why we do oppose this bill.

The issues this bill is addressing, the solutions this bill is proposing have nothing to do with red tape, the majority of them. There are probably small pieces of this bill that you can say, "This is a baby step, a good baby step forward for something," but as usual, as we have seen in the UCP pattern for the past six years, anything they had to do, that they are pushed to do with public pressure or demand from Albertans, they try to tie it with their notorious agenda. They have done it in Bill 6, they have done it in other bills, and they have done it in Bill 10.

We do support the fraction of this bill that talks about kind of providing a solution to streamline foreign credentials, where it is legislating to eliminate the requirement for regulatory bodies to require Canadian experience to get recognition of their education. Mr. Speaker, I served as a critic to the multiculturalism and antiracism file in an earlier term, and I worked with my colleagues in serving the labour and immigration portfolio. I participated in consultation that was province-wide. All these stakeholders, professional bodies were of the view that this is something long overdue, that is costing our society, that is costing our province.

4:50

Our province, Alberta, had the highest overqualified number of people due to these irregular practices. The people come from other places, working in professions sometimes – I do have an example, actually, a very close example that I see in my office, who is a professional microbiologist who came to complete his PhD at the University of Alberta. He ended up losing it because the government closed the program, and the funds were not available to continue his PhD. Ended up back in the middle of the process.

Talent like that: you know, we were not able to use his expertise in a situation like COVID, where we were struggling to recruit people even. We remember the UCP, like, their hiring practices around health care workers. I remember that a lot of health care workers were let go, and AHS was calling them back during the COVID time because they needed more people.

There are also experiences on the other side, the people who are fully qualified and experienced and their talent and skills could not be used. I know individuals in my community who have a PhD in their subject, but they spent all their life working in labour. I know individuals who have a master's in their profession and teachings, even in English, not any other language. They were not able to pursue their education and practice because of the systemic barriers we have.

One of those individuals even ran for us back in '19. The *Edmonton Journal* actually published a huge report on him, his qualifications and his work experience and his contributions to the community till today. But he could not – it was lost to us. You know, I was reading the data that we are losing \$13 billion to \$17 billion in financials annually in Canada due to overqualified individuals not being properly able to contribute to our society.

So that is a fraction of what was recommended. I had consultations in rural Alberta. I had consultations in Lethbridge, Calgary, Edmonton, and all the professional bodies were on board to address this issue. What we are seeing in this bill is only a fraction of it, but I still welcome that.

What has been tied to it? Oh, my God. I don't know. This will not be surprising for the government caucus members at all given what

we are debating in the House: Bill 2, Bill 9, another notwithstanding clause taking away the democratic rights of the organization.

The government is hiding its own failure under divisive politics, the same old rule. It means you have nothing in hand to focus on real problems or serve your province, and then you play wedge politics. This government has been doing, so far successfully – until the election is called, they can feel good. But in the feedback we receive from constituents and the calls I have during the session, people want to talk about the issues. Albertans are speaking up, and they are fed up.

The government, specifically this UCP government, cut funding to postsecondary education. The postsecondaries heavily relied on Jason Kenney's modern slavery policy to, in a flux of international students, catch up with the loss of funding they had from these governments. I know the government wants to always blame Ottawa for not doing this, not doing that. But this is the policy that Jason Kenney always, you know, took a victory lap on, that he is the originator of, when he cut down immigration based on human compassionate grounds, their family class, the other categories that existed. He slashed it and opened a new temporary foreign and international student policy.

He claimed that he was bringing many more immigrants to Canada than even the Trudeau Liberals. That's what he was claiming. He claimed it in press conferences and media. He claimed it in community meetings. And now, because these governments and this UCP government could not keep pace with the population growth – they did not invest in public services, they did not invest in hospitals, they did not invest in schools – now they're blaming immigration, the new immigrants.

On the other hand, I know that they go to so many small businesses, so many entrepreneurs and brag about the skilled labourers and employees they are providing to them. And then the hypocrisy on the other side is that to appease their fringe ultra right-wing supporters, they play this wedge game: blame immigrants for everything that's going bad. Given this is public safety, but they will not tell once in this House what they have done to improve these services, when was the last time they went to work in the community, to listen to the issues first-hand from the community members? They didn't.

[The Speaker in the chair]

What is clear: we know that \$700 million in one budget was taken away from the postsecondary institutions by this UCP government, and they had to cut down so many programs. One college told me that they had to cut, like, 42 per cent of their programs because of that.

5:00

On top of this, I heard from stakeholders, the immigration consultants, and they were all complaining about growing tuition fees and, you know, injustices and unfair practices. I remember actually attending the event of one university. I will not name it. I had a speaking role, and I spoke with the members of the governing council. I talked about the cuts. That was a private university. He replied back to me: oh, that didn't hit us as much as the others, like the University of Alberta. The reason why he was saying that was because they increased their international student fees to double the amount, from \$12,000 to a \$25,000 annual fee.

At the end of the day, all those postsecondary graduates – what are they doing? – filling those meals for McDonald's. All those large corporations this UCP is a fan of. Tim Hortons: the people there are strongly anti raising minimum wage. Postsecondary labour, the fast food services, definitely, you could see their

journey, where they come from, the amount of investment into the education system.

With that, I want to adjourn the debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 9

Protecting Alberta's Children Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

[Debate adjourned November 25: Mr. Sabir speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. member, would you like to carry on?

Mr. Sabir: Yes. How much time do I have?

The Speaker: Twelve minutes.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, this bill invokes the notwithstanding clause to three bills that were passed by the UCP government in the previous session: bills 26, 27, and 29. In fact, there is a court challenge working its way through the courts right now on bills 26 and 27, and now the government is invoking this notwithstanding clause, Charter override clause, on these three pieces of legislation. Yesterday one of the government members explained that section 33 was included in the Constitution so that politicians can keep the judiciary in check. That was the most ridiculous and absurd claim that I've ever heard in this Chamber in the last 11 years.

Charter rights, Mr. Speaker, are not absolute. In fact, the very first section of the Charter reads that, "The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees the rights and freedoms set out in it subject only to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society." Clearly, the Charter allows Legislatures, parliament, to pass laws that may infringe on the rights and freedoms contained in the Charter, but those infringements need to be "demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society." Clearly, the government is not confident that the infringement contained in bills 26, 27, or 29 will withstand the Charter's scrutiny. They are not confident that they can demonstrably justify those . . .

Member Irwin: An intervention.

Thank you to the MLA. I'm really mindful of the fact that that MLA and a number of our MLAs on this side of the House have a very good understanding of the law and of the Constitution. You know, the Charter of Rights, as the member is starting to talk about: we're talking about inherent human rights here, and I would ask the member if he could outline a little bit what those rights are and also which sections of the Charter are being impacted. I think it's important that Albertans and Canadians understand just what an egregious attack this is on the rights of our community. So I ask the member, if he doesn't mind giving a little bit of an outline there, to help us all understand just how egregious this is.

Thank you.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Member, for that question. I will certainly touch on the rights that are impacted and attacked in these pieces of legislation.

What I was saying here is that the Charter does have that reasonable justification limit built into it, and now government invoking the notwithstanding clause clearly indicates that the government doesn't have confidence in the legislation that they passed last session: bills 26, 27, and 29. They know that it cannot withstand the Charter's scrutiny.

So what they are doing here is that they are invoking the notwithstanding clause so that this bill shall operate notwithstanding

section 2 of the Charter, and sections 7 to 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Alberta Bill of Rights, and the Alberta Human Rights Act. That's coming from a government that takes, I guess, pride in the freedom not to wear masks and all those kinds of things.

Let me get a little bit into what these sections are. Section 2 guarantees four fundamental freedoms for everyone in Canada. No exception. Everyone in Canada has a freedom of conscience and religion; freedom of thought, belief, opinion, and expression; freedom of peaceful assembly; and freedom of association, which also includes the right to strike and collective bargaining. That's section 2, that the government will override by invoking section 33 of the Constitution.

The next one is section 7, which says that "everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of [natural] justice. Again, important rights: the right to life, liberty, and security of the person. Clearly, the way the government is trampling on Albertans' rights is not in accordance with the principles of natural justice. That's why they need the Charter override.

Then in sections 7 to 15 there are other rights on unreasonable search, the right to bail, and all those things that are also included in this. But the important one that I want to highlight is Section 15, the right to equality.

Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

Clearly, the government knows that their bills that they passed in the previous session – 26, 27, and 29 – do violate the equality right in the Charter, section 15. They are clearly treating certain Albertans differently than others. That's why they need this Charter override.

5:10

If we look at international human rights instruments, some of which are the basis of the Charter, there are nine core international human rights instruments, and all of them are based on the principles of nondiscrimination and equality. These are the fundamental principles which make the basis of all core human rights treaties; be that the covenant on civil and political rights, be that the covenant on social and cultural rights, convention on the rights of the child, convention against elimination of torture and degrading punishment. All those instruments, all nine of them are based on the fundamental principles of nondiscrimination and equality. Clearly, these pieces of legislation do discriminate against certain Albertans. They do violate the equality rights of those Albertans, and that's why they are again using section 33 of the Constitution.

Mr. Speaker, we live in a democratic society, and one of the fundamental premises or principles of democracy is that it protects everyone's rights. Majority rule in a democracy is a means for electing and organizing government and deciding public issues. It cannot and must not be used as another means or avenue to oppress the marginalized, to oppress minority groups, to oppress those who have less voice in that majority. It cannot. Just like in an authoritarian rule, one person who is not elected, when they do those kinds of things, when they attack people's rights, whether it's the right to democracy, right to vote, right to association, right to collective bargaining, basic rights, life, liberty, and security, we stand against that attack, that authoritarian regime. That's what we do. When we talk about authoritarian regimes around the world,

that's the basis of our differences. That's why we oppose those regimes.

No one should be allowed to trample over people's rights, and if a majority rule will do that exactly after being elected in a democratic process, then the line between democracy and authoritarianism will get blurred and we will be pushing ourselves, our society more towards authoritarianism. In a society like ours, which is diverse, which is comprised of people of many different faith backgrounds, cultural backgrounds, religious backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds, I think it's inevitable that there will be differences of opinion, there will be differences of views, and there will be differences of values. What the Charter does is that it guarantees that everyone, no matter what their faith background is, no matter what their religion is, no matter what their beliefs are, should be able to exercise their rights and be who they are.

As a person of faith, the Charter gives me that right, that I can be who I am, but the Charter doesn't extend to anyone to impose their views, their values, onto somebody else. That's also a limitation of the Charter. It gives everyone equal rights but gives no one the right to impose their views, their values, on somebody else.

Here this government is clearly imposing their world view, the world view of their base, for political needs, onto certain Albertans. It's violating their basic, fundamental human and democratic rights, rights protected under section 2, rights protected under sections 7 to 15, the right to equality, and I urge all members to think hard about it and not vote in favour of this bill. This bill is a dangerous bill. It is setting a dangerous precedent in this society.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have rights that are independent of particular laws . . . They are not rights that are granted by this Legislature . . . They are inalienable . . . they don't get suspended in times of emergency. Rights, being inalienable, exist at all times.

Those are the words of the Premier, spoken here in this Legislature just about one year ago.

Yet here, with Bill 9, we have her and her government putting forward legislation that unquestionably undermines the very principles she once claimed to hold. In introducing this bill, we heard this government repeatedly say that they want to have, quote, the last word on rights in Alberta, end quote, that through Bill 9 they as the government of Alberta are declaring that they will decide which of the rights outlined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms Albertans will be allowed to have, a complete reversal, an utter betrayal of what the Premier once said she believes in, that rights are inalienable; that is, existing outside the power of government to determine or define. It certainly seems the only thing this government now considers to be inalienable, inviolable, is their own pursuit of and grasp on power.

The Premier once declared that she believed the unvaccinated were the most discriminated-against group she'd ever seen. She believed this enough that she went so far as to, as determined by the Ethics Commissioner, attempt to interfere in a criminal case involving a far-right, anti health measures activist. Yet here she is today, leading a government that is stripping the right to choice of medical care from Alberta parents and their children, a government stepping into the doctor's office and inserting itself between Alberta families and their doctors and determining what medical care they're allowed to pursue for their children.

The Premier who declared herself a champion of freedom is leading a government that is violating every one of the principles and ideals she once professed to hold, and they're invoking the notwithstanding clause to shield themselves against any legal

challenge of that intrusion. The thing is that the Premier considered the reasonable health restrictions that were put in place in the midst of a global pandemic to be the most significant violation of individual rights and the worst discrimination she'd ever seen.

You know, if I recall correctly, Mr. Speaker, she even supported the hundreds of individuals who occupied the streets of Ottawa and tormented the residents there for weeks on end, the individuals who blockaded the Alberta-U.S. border at Coutts, that Transport Canada estimates halted nearly \$4 billion in trade activity. But you know what? Every government that brought in those public health restrictions allowed them to be challenged in court, and they were, multiple times, over and over, by churches, by businesses, by individuals, and in the majority of the cases the courts found that the public health orders were justified and reasonable. Indeed, right here in Alberta courts ruled that the orders that were put forward by the chief medical officer of health "were amply . . . justified as reasonable limits in a free and democratic society."

5:20

Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, like I said, not one government, not here in Alberta or anywhere else in Canada, felt the need to invoke the notwithstanding clause to defend the actions they took, the actions that the Premier and other members of this government railed against. Those governments believed the decisions they made and that they were undertaking were in the best interests of the people they served and were compliant with the Charter of Rights, and they had the courage of their convictions to let their decisions be challenged and given full scrutiny in a court of law, a courage this government utterly lacks.

Indeed, this government is trying to portray Bill 9 as an act of strength. They are trying to portray themselves as bold leaders that are standing their ground. Their decision, Mr. Speaker, is not that. Their decision to invoke the notwithstanding clause to trample the rights of Albertans is an act of utter cowardice. It's an admission that they fundamentally believe their legislation would not be able to withstand a court challenge.

Their legislation, in fact, is facing court challenges. In June of this year two organizations, Egale and the Skipping Stone Foundation, and five youths launched a constitutional challenge to Bill 26, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2). They're arguing that the bill is a clear violation of the constitutional rights of gender-diverse youth in Alberta; specifically, their sections 7, 12, and 15 Charter rights, which protect "the right to life, liberty and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice," "the right not to be subjected to any cruel and unusual treatment or punishment," and "the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination" on the basis of gender identity.

Also in June, Justice Allison Kuntz granted an interlocutory – pardon me; tough word to pronounce – injunction that prevented Bill 26 from coming into force.

The Canadian Medical Association and three Alberta doctors have also launched a second Charter challenge to Bill 26, arguing that the law violates doctors' freedom of conscience. Mr. Speaker, this government is scared to face them in court because they know their law will not stand.

In September Egale and the Skipping Stone Foundation launched a Charter challenge to Bill 27, the Education Amendment Act, 2024, arguing that it strips educators of the ability to exercise professional judgment in supporting their students and comprises a direct attack on the constitutional rights of gender-diverse youth in Alberta; specifically, that the name and pronoun restrictions violate multiple protections under the Canadian Charter of Rights and

Freedoms: the right to the security of the person, section 7; section 12, the right to be free from cruel and unusual treatment; and section 15, “the right to . . . equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination” on the basis of gender identity.

Now, Mr. Speaker, today in question period the Premier accused the Leader of the Opposition of styling himself as judge, jury, and executioner. [interjection] The fact is that that’s precisely what she and her government, including the minister of transportation should he vote for this bill, are choosing to do with Bill 9, circumventing the place of the courts and claiming their authority for themselves. They know that no judge is going to rule in their favour. Indeed, not only styling themselves as judge and jury but surrogate parent, family doctor, endocrinologist, mental health professionals. This government thinks they stand above all of them, that they know better than all of them.

It’s not the first time we’ve seen this government insert itself into the doctor’s office and try to interfere in the decisions about providing care. A few years back they passed legislation that put significant restrictions on what treatments a doctor could prescribe for a patient struggling with substance use. That led to a court case, a Charter challenge by one woman who was affected. She was granted an injunction against this government’s interference in her treatment as well as 67 per cent of her legal costs in recognition by that judge that the government had forced her to go to court to defend her rights. At least the government had the courage to show up and go to court on that one, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, I haven’t been able to find out more about the status of her case. It may be in process. This is exactly the sort of situation where this government is choosing to invoke the nuclear option, the notwithstanding clause, to avoid because they lack the courage.

This is a government that doesn’t like being challenged, Mr. Speaker. No. The thing is that they’ve proven themselves to be the most interventionist, most authoritarian government in our province’s history, micromanagers who are dedicated to trying to control everything. We’ve got a growing record of political interference with what is supposed to be independent public bodies. In this government’s view, they are the experts on everything, the only rightful arbiters of power who should never be questioned. They consider themselves above any system of accountability or transparency.

For proof we only have to look at the recent report from the Auditor General on their failed attempt to privatize provincial lab services. Mr. Speaker, remember this government spent three years putting together the deal with DynaLife – three years – and it fell apart in six months. It led to skyrocketing wait times for lab testing, mistakes that could have cost lives. They ended up having to buy the contract back, move everything back into the public system. Appropriately, the Auditor General launched an investigation in October 2023 to find out what went wrong, how much it all cost. He expected to release that in early 2024.

Instead, it dropped this month, two years later, and you know why? Why did it take so long? Well, according to the Auditor General this government, the UCP, tried to claim legal and cabinet privileges over a wide range of documents without, in some cases, any clear rationale or evidence for doing so. They had a team of lawyers conduct a line-by-line review of over 10,000 documents involved before they would hand them over. They limited the Auditor General’s access to documents by redacting whole sections of thousands of documents, with others being inaccessible behind password protection, missing, or even destroyed, and the report reveals that at several points – multiple points – senior leaders at AHS had actually warned the government that this wasn’t a good idea. It was likely to fail, and they wouldn’t realize any savings.

But government ministers knew better, Mr. Speaker. They forced it through. They interfered to pressure them and force that contract through, much as they did with the contract to purchase nearly \$100 million of low-grade Turkish Tylenol, most of which never arrived and the rest of which was barely used, because they believe government knows best and no one has the right to question it. Ideology trumps facts and expertise. Ideology trumps reality.

That’s bad enough, Mr. Speaker, when you’re just talking about health care and health care services even though that can in fact mean life or death for Albertans. It’s absolutely unconscionable when it comes to Albertans’ Charter rights, but that’s what lies behind Bill 9, their decision to take the unprecedented measure of invoking the notwithstanding clause to trample on Albertans’ rights, to essentially say: your rights don’t count because we said so. Bill 9 constitutes the second, third, and fourth times they’re doing so in the space of just four weeks.

Of course, as we all know, their first target was Alberta teachers. This Premier, who declared herself a champion of free speech, well, she used the notwithstanding clause in legislation to strip that right from Alberta teachers. The Premier who declared rights are inalienable used legislation to take away their right to protest against government action or institution, their freedom of peaceful assembly, their right to strike, and to impose a contract not through arbitration by a neutral third party. No. That would be too much like a court opinion, Mr. Speaker. This is a government that thinks they’re above any check and balance, beyond the reach of anyone who might tell them no, so they use the notwithstanding clause against teachers to strip their rights. Now with Bill 9 they’re doing it again to target a vulnerable community who want nothing other than to be able to live as their true authentic selves.

It’s unconscionable and it’s despicable, and the fact is that we don’t know who will be next. I mean, a government this arrogant, this entitled, this obsessed with power, with so little regard for anyone who disagrees with them: well, they’re likely to target pretty much anyone, any marginalized or minority group. Will they invoke it against the disability community to prevent any challenge of their changes to AISH? Against racialized Albertans in their pursuit of denying newcomers any access to services? To override or restrict access to abortion or other reproductive care, as we’ve heard government members advocate for? We don’t know because, again, a government that’s willing to do this to vulnerable youth with so little consideration for the potential harm on the basis of conspiracy and the pursuit of political power and gain: well, Mr. Speaker, they’re capable of almost anything.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I do have hope. Since this government took their first step down this road last month – you know what? – I’ve seen Albertans sit up, take notice, and start to engage in a way I have not seen in a very long time.

5:30

You know what? This Premier, this government may have finally gone too far, stepped over the line, inspired a movement, awoken a sleeping giant that will be the beginning of their end because Albertans know, Mr. Speaker, that this isn’t right. Albertans know that this is not how you treat your neighbours. This is not Alberta values. This is not who the vast majority of Albertans are. This government has lost the plot. They have lost their moral compass, and Albertans aren’t going to tolerate it because Albertans know better is possible, and they’re waking up and they’re starting to demand it.

I want to thank the folks that are here in the gallery today to watch this debate, because – you know what? – their rights are on the line. They’re here to watch democracy in action, to watch a government enact the laws that are going to strip their rights from them. I hope

government members recognize that. I hope they feel some sense of shame because what this is is shameful, Mr. Speaker. This will go down in the annals of not just Alberta history; Canadian history.

The Speaker: The hon. minister of preventative health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to rise today in strong support of Bill 9, the Protecting Alberta's Children's Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, and to speak specifically to the health care implications because the work that we are undertaking here is fundamentally about safeguarding – and I'll repeat that, safeguarding – the health, the safety, and the futures of Alberta's children and youth.

As Minister of Primary and Preventative Health Services I'm entrusted with the responsibility to ensure that every young Albertan is protected and supported and given the opportunity to grow into adulthood with their full range of life choices intact. This is not a responsibility I take lightly. As a mother of seven and a grandmother of eight it is something that I hold very dear to my heart, this responsibility for our youth and our children. It is a duty that requires us to approach complex and sensitive issues with compassion, with care, with evidence, and with, above all, clarity. Bill 9 allows us to do exactly that.

Mr. Speaker, our government made a commitment to refocus Alberta's health care system to ensure that patients receive the care they need when and where they need it. Last year's Bill 26, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No.2), represented a major step forward in delivering on that promise. Today Bill 9 builds on that foundation by ensuring that these policies remain stable and enforceable through the uncertainty of ongoing court challenges.

We recognize that children and youth who identify as transgender or gender diverse often experience profound emotional challenges. These experiences are real, and they deserve to be treated with dignity and compassion. Families navigating these conversations have told us again and again that they want clear guidance, they want consistent standards, and they want a health system that responds with support, not confusion. They want to know that they are not being left to navigate these complex pathways alone.

Bill 9 builds off grounded policy direction, not an ideology or emotion, and I know there's a lot surrounding this issue. This is found in the growing body of international evidence from countries such as Finland, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Denmark, and Norway. Each have launched comprehensive reviews of the medical evidence for gender transition treatments among youth. Many of these jurisdictions were once early adopters of medical transition for minors, but now they have shifted toward more cautious approaches that emphasize careful assessment, underlying mental health considerations, and long term well-being. Mr. Speaker, their findings have been clear. The evidence for early medical interventions in minors remains uncertain, and the risks can be significant and lifelong.

Albertans agree with this compassionate and responsible approach. The policies enacted under Bill 9 prohibiting gender reassignment surgeries for minors under 18 years of age and the restriction of puberty blockers and hormone treatments for the purpose of gender reassignment for children under 16 reflect the evolving global consensus that irreversible interventions should not occur before a child has the maturity to fully understand and consent to their long-term consequences.

Mr. Speaker, let me be clear. This is about providing appropriate care that supports mental health, care that prioritizes counselling, care that gives young people time to understand who they are without the pressure of making decisions that may impact their

fertility, their bone health, their neurological development, and future life outcomes.

Last year our government undertook extensive consultations across Alberta, speaking with parents, with educators, with school staff, with health care professionals, with sports leaders, and members of the transgender community. These engagements were thoughtful, emotional, and always instructive. Parents expressed their desire to be included. Teachers asked for clear guidelines, and clinicians asked for consistent, evidence-based direction. Many Albertans told us that they wanted support strengthened, not weakened, to ensure that future generations do not face unnecessary medical risks. Bill 9 reflects all of these voices, and at the heart are three core principles.

First, Bill 9 protects the future choices and long term well-being of children and youth. That has to be paramount. It ensures that children have the time and the space to mature before making life-altering decisions. We cannot ignore that youth, especially those experiencing distress, are still developing cognitively, emotionally, and socially. Responsible governance requires that we put their long term well-being above all else.

Second, Bill 9 reinforces the vital roles of parents. Parents are not bystanders. They are their children's first protectors. They're guides. They're advocates. They are there for the long haul, from the beginning all the way through life. That is why our government requires parental notification and consent when students under 16 request to change their names or pronouns in school. These changes are not superficial. They reflect deeply personal considerations, and parents deserve to be involved in supporting their children through them. We are also requiring parental opt-in for any instruction related to gender identity, sexual orientation, or human sexuality. These measures ensure that parents remain at the centre of their child's development, where they rightly belong, Mr. Speaker.

Third, Bill 9 defends fairness and safety in women's and girls' sports. Alberta has been clear. Participation in female sport categories must be limited to those who are born female. This is not exclusion. It's about preserving a level playing field, ensuring safety, and protecting opportunities for young women and girls across our province.

Mr. Speaker, these principles are at risk due to ongoing litigation. Three lawsuits have been launched, and one injunction is already in place. These challenges could take years – years – during which time children may be exposed to irreversible medical interventions without the safeguards we have put in place, years during which parents may be sidelined, years during which uncertainty hangs over classrooms and sports organizations.

5:40

This is why Bill 9 invokes the notwithstanding clause. This is not a decision any government takes lightly, but it is a decision that responsible governments must be willing to make. I dare say it is a bold, courageous decision. Invoking the notwithstanding clause ensures that policies designed to protect children and strengthen families can continue without lengthy legal delays. It ensures clarity for health care providers, educators, and for parents, and it ensures that decisions about Alberta's children remain with those who are accountable to Albertans, not to activist groups, legal delays, or shifting judicial interpretations.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 9 is not about politics. It's about children. Let's put children first. It's about their futures, and it's about ensuring that Alberta remains a place where children can grow up safe, supported, and surrounded by adults who put their best interests first.

To those young Albertans who are questioning who they are, who may feel uncertain, who are simply trying to navigate the challenges

of growing up: you are valued. You deserve support, safety, and understanding, and you belong in Alberta. Nothing, but nothing, in this legislation changes our commitment to you and to your families. You will always have access to mental health supports, to compassionate care, and to a province that wants you to grow up into adulthood with strength and confidence, and we will be there to support you through every decision you make.

Parents, please know you are not alone. We hear you, we respect you, and we are acting to support you in your role in your children's lives.

I am proud to support this legislation, Mr. Speaker, and I urge all members of this Assembly to stand with us in protecting Alberta's children, respecting Alberta's parents, and upholding the values that make our province strong and free.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That just sounded to me like a relitigation of the conversation that we had a year ago about bills 26, 27, and 29. Not once did the minister of health reference their choice – and it is a choice – to use the notwithstanding clause. It is a coward's way out of the legislation. If the legislation held its own water, which the Premier said it did, we would not be here talking about Bill 9, rehashing what are immensely emotional, painful, deeply personal, and very difficult decisions. Rather than hear the minister stand up and defend their choice of the notwithstanding clause again, they used the opportunity to relitigate and rehash what we had the agony of having to sit through a year ago.

It is stunning, Mr. Speaker, that we are standing here once again to talk about the notwithstanding clause, a tool that this government has now used four times in as many weeks. We can hear about the soapboxing from the minister opposite as often as they may like, but we did not hear any conversation about Bill 9, which is the item of our debate this evening.

If they were so confident in those pieces of legislation that passed through under time allocation a year ago right around this time, then we would not be standing here in Bill 9, providing the platform, once again, for the UCP government to spread a great deal of misinformation, a great deal of very harmful and hurtful and deeply detrimental rhetoric around a small group of people who are just trying to live their lives. I'm not going to go down that path. I'm not going to relitigate because I think that my colleagues, in the room here a year ago, have made our position very, very clear about bills 26, 27, and 29. Instead, we are going to talk about the UCP's inclination – in fact, it almost seems like their delight in rolling over the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, in exercising the notwithstanding clause that should be used under only the most exceptional circumstances, but, you know, if that's your hammer, everything looks like a nail.

The minister referenced the use, the implementation, the introduction of Bill 9 because it creates certainty for parents given court challenges. If there is any uncertainty, it is of the UCP's making, Mr. Speaker. What was already a very challenging and difficult, very personal decision to be made by youth or adults facing some challenging conversations and some challenging questions about who they fundamentally are and how they see themselves – those were decisions, particularly for youth, that happened with them, a caring parent or adult caregiver in their lives, and a medical professional. The only thing that creates uncertainty is when politicians insist on inserting themselves into that decision-making. Nobody invited them into the doctor's office, and so if there is any uncertainty, it has come as a result of the legislation that we had to debate a year ago.

I'm sorry to the minister that court challenges are such an irritation. Isn't that annoying that it doesn't allow for the expeditious implementation of legislation that is undeniably threatening inalienable, universal human rights in this country? Those darn courts, just always getting in the way. Everybody in these Chambers needs to be reminded of what courts do and that it is with our government and our judicial system that these are two pillars that keep us accountable and that they keep us honest so that regardless of the political whims of whatever government happens to be sitting on that side of the aisle, they are not allowed to just ride over the fundamental beliefs, the social contract that we have with each other in our community.

So I'm sorry that the court is creating some uncertainty, is creating a bit of an annoyance and some irritation for the minister. If they believe that the legislation holds up, if it would withstand the court challenges, then they would see that go through, and we would be on our way. To be clear, that's not a path that I would ever condone, and I know everybody on this side of Chambers is on that side, but then it is up to the courts to decide. It is not government who gets to just take their hat off and put on the hat of judge to decide what qualifies or not as a human right.

Mr. Speaker, I prepared my notes today to really try to extend an olive branch. I heard thoughtful commentary from members opposite yesterday afternoon, from parents, from the Member for Livingstone-Macleod, from the Member for Highwood who stood up and talked about the incredibly unparalleled responsibility and joy it is to be a parent. I share in that, and I thought maybe we could have that as our starting point: that we share. We heard from the minister. She has seven children, eight grandchildren. If only so many families could have that kind of richness in their lives, but that's where it stops.

That's where it stops, Mr. Speaker. I heard the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud speak so clearly about being the mother of a daughter, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora talking about all those kids lucky enough to call her auntie.

5:50

I so often believe – and I think it's what maybe helps some of us come to work every single day – that we fundamentally start from the same starting place and that we fundamentally want to have a better province for everybody. We may just have some differences in how to get there, but I'm not so sure about that today. Not after hearing the comments from the minister who, one, continues to repeat and reiterate the incredibly harmful rhetoric that we have heard around this particular issue and, two, simply does not support the rights of every Albertan that are protected under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. She doesn't even defend the rights of their own legislation under the Alberta Bill of Rights and the amendment act that protected the freedom to make medical choice. So that's a generosity that I'm not willing to extend any further.

Here's what is a matter of debate because we are in fact in Chambers and this is the space for that, for sometimes heated, strong disagreement. Let me be clear. I could not disagree more with this legislation, with the legislation that this government passed with the majority this time last year: the denial of medical care, the obsession with transgender athletes, and the insistence that a school be mandated to out a child regardless of safety considerations at home. It is so fundamentally wrong. It violates the right of a parent to make medical choices with and for their child in co-operation with a medical provider, and it forces an unprecedented breach of privacy for every girl over the age of 12 who wants to compete in sports in school.

We stood for many hours in these Chambers laying out our case why this legislation was so wrong, and it saddened me greatly that

a subject that is so sensitive, so personal, so difficult, would be politicized by this government to appease their base. It is chum in the waters. These are health decisions that should never ever have been asked of members in this Chamber to weigh in on. Though I wish it were never brought to the floor of these Chambers, and it saddens me greatly that it ever was, I do uphold the belief that the legislation was a matter of debate and we did everything we could to debate the issue. We did everything we could to appeal to somebody's moral base on the other side and to vote against bills 26, 27, and 29.

What is not a matter of debate in these Chambers or any other House across this country are the inalienable universal rights that are contained within the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Those, Mr. Speaker, are not up for debate, yet the members opposite, the UCP government, treat it as such. They are the rights to the freedom of expression, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly; the rights to equality; the rights to life, liberty, and the security of the person. Those are the fundamental rights that exist regardless of what government is in power. They are the rights that protect all members of our community: UCP, NDP, and everything else in between. For a government that is so excited about putting strong and free on every licence plate, on every letterhead that they have, it is not strong and free for everybody. Far, far from it. And that is evidenced today in Bill 9 with the use of the notwithstanding clause.

If they were so strong and free, they would show that their legislation would hold up in the courts. The Charter is not to be thrown out at the political whims of a government. The use of the notwithstanding clause in Bill 9 shows that they know that their legislation would not hold up and that they didn't think it through. It's just like the recall legislation, Mr. Speaker. Oh, hey, I've got a good idea. Let's implement some legislation because that would really do damage to the other guys, but then as soon as the tables are flipped and the same piece of legislation has to be used against some of their own, then all of a sudden the holes are showing. We'll see pretty soon here if that recall legislation is in fact recalled.

We also saw it in Bill 2 just a couple of weeks ago, when we saw teachers forced back to work. They could have done their homework. They could have made a substantiated claim that teachers needed to be back without the use of the notwithstanding clause. Instead of doing the work and instead of standing by their legislation to defend it in the court of law, they apply the notwithstanding clause, and they're off to the races. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms is not to be respected or not when they feel like it because they didn't do the homework. It should not be easy. The use of the notwithstanding clause should not be easy. Our fundamental, defensible, universal, and inalienable human rights and freedoms should not be just driven over at the whim of a government.

Mr. Speaker, I have a daughter in grade 9, and much to the joy of my father, a former junior high social studies teacher, social studies is her favourite subject. I should add also that she is a stellar soccer player. We do a lot of driving around in our extracurriculars. She doesn't play school soccer. It breaks my heart to think that there are girls like my daughter, who may not have the same opportunities as she does but who love soccer as passionately as she does, and the only way that they can access that is at school. Now for them to play in an intramural sport, they have to provide some document to administration that says that they were in fact born girls. It is unbelievable to me. The minister has the gall to talk about compassion and dignity and care for children. It is too far. It has gone too far.

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

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have quite a lot to say about this bill . . .

The Speaker: You have one minute. Carry on.

Dr. Metz: . . . and I realize I'm going to get cut off. All I'll be able to say today is that this is Bill 9, which should be called the removing the protection of Alberta's children amendment act. This bill removes the right of parents to access medically recommended care for their children. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, only one person should be talking right now.

Please, carry on.

Dr. Metz: This bill removes the right of health care providers such as physicians, nurses, psychologists, to provide recommended care to patients. This authoritarian government has decided that they will make medical decisions for children in Alberta. This government believes that they know what is best for Alberta's children, not the parents and the care providers and the children themselves who have been working through very painful and distressing situations.

This government does not know what is best for every single child. They are just flexing their muscles to show that they have the authority to make whatever medical decisions they want for anyone in Alberta because they can bring this notwithstanding clause in for anything, and they're proving that right now.

The Speaker: Hon. members, it is 6 p.m., and as per the standing orders, the House is adjourned until 7:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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