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The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, December 8, 2025

Day 22

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

Second Session

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Independent: 2

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, December 8, 2025

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 10

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

The Speaker: The Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction.

Mr. Nally: I'll waive it.

The Speaker: Is there anybody else? Okay. The Member for Calgary-North East.

Member Gurinder Brar: Mr. Speaker, this is a story about four people: Everybody, Somebody, Anybody, and Nobody. There was an important job to be done, and Everybody was asked to do it. Everybody was sure Somebody would do it, and Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, and Nobody realized Everybody wouldn't do it. In the end, Everybody blamed Somebody when actually Nobody asked Anybody.

The most important part of this anecdote is not Everybody, Somebody, Anybody, or Nobody. It is the job that was supposed to be done: the job to build more schools in our communities, the job to build more hospitals in our neighbourhoods, the job to build a province where everyone feels welcomed.

Instead of getting the job done, this government is wasting the time of the Legislature debating about citizenship markers on drivers' licences. Instead of respecting teachers and their rights, this government pushed them back into overcrowded, underfunded, and complex classrooms. Instead of building more hospitals and strengthening our public health care, this government is privatizing our health care. Instead of making our province more welcoming, diverse, and inclusive, this government is attacking diversity, equity, and inclusion. Let me go a little bit further back. Bill C-24, niqab ban policy, funding cuts to immigrant settlement services, barbaric cultural practices, refusal to collect race-based data, shredding the antiracism council: the list continues about the anti-immigrant narrative coming entirely from the Conservative governments.

Mr. Speaker, today is the time to ask: who are those people who are shouting, "Mass deportations" in the Alberta Next Panel organized by this UCP government? Why didn't the Premier shut them down? Why did she say that she doesn't think the level of immigration is not there yet? The two words "just yet" are concerning. Is Bill 10 inspired by the words "just yet"? Why do we have to debate about citizenship markers when we have so many more important things to debate about in this Legislature?

When I door-knock and when my colleagues on this side of the House door-knock, attend community events, hold town halls, we don't hear people talking about citizenship markers, licence plates, or giving more power to the Justice minister. We hear people struggling to put food on their table. We hear people waiting for hours in our hospitals. We hear people sending their kids one hour each way every day to schools. These are not just questions, Mr.

Speaker; these are the daily lives of the people. Us debating Bill 10 shows how out of touch this UCP government is from everyday lives of Albertans.

When it comes to Bill 10, Mr. Speaker, I will talk about three pieces of this legislation. First and foremost: citizenship markers. The Canadian Civil Liberties Association has issued an unmistakable warning about section 3 of this bill. They are not mincing words. They argue that the Alberta government's plan to place citizenship status on drivers' licences is not a minor administrative tweak; it is a profound threat to equality rights. It is a serious intrusion into personal privacy and a step that could erode the civil liberties that Canadians have fought generations to protect. CCLA cautions that this approach may run counter to the guarantees enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. When an established civil liberties watchdog tells a government that its actions may violate the Charter, we should be paying attention, Mr. Speaker.

Concerns do not stop there. In 2018 the office of the United Nations high commissioner for human rights released a report, a comprehensive global analysis examining racial discrimination in laws, policies, and administrative practices related to citizenship, nationality, and immigration, and it offers a sobering truth. Whenever citizenship or nationality status becomes a formal prerequisite for rights, benefits, or access to essential services or when it is turned into a visible marker on identification documents, the individuals who suffer the most are racialized minorities, migrants, refugees, stateless people, and communities already pushed to the margins of the society.

The findings are alarming, Mr. Speaker. The reports show that turning nationality into a gatekeeping tool does not produce fairness or clarity. It widens inequality. It creates new barriers for people to access housing, social services, health care, employment, and education. It fosters an environment where people are treated differently, not because of their behaviour or their contribution but because of what a government document says about their origin.

This report is not just about bureaucracy; it's about dignity, Mr. Speaker. The UN warns that when governments put nationality or citizenship labels on ID documents, it sends a social signal. It tells certain people, especially people of colour, religious minorities, newcomers, and refugees, that no matter how long they have lived in the country, no matter how much they have contributed, no matter what IDs they have in their wallets, they may still be viewed as others, as outsiders, as foreigners, as people whose belonging is conditional and not assured.

The UN returned to the same issue in 2020 and 2021 in its follow-up studies examining digital identification systems, immigration status verification tools, and other technology-driven methods that governments around the world use to monitor, check, or classify people based on their citizenship or immigration category. The conclusion is clear, disturbing, and troubling. These systems, especially when citizenship or nationality becomes a flag on a document, disproportionately harm migrants, refugees, stateless individuals, and long-term residents who are not citizens. These systems deepen existing inequalities, fuel xenophobia, and reinforce racist assumptions.

The UN showed that as governments adopt new digital status-checking practices, the burden almost always falls hardest on those with the least power: again, migrant workers, asylum seekers, refugees, racialized newcomers, and religious minorities. When institutions and employers see nationality printed boldly on an ID card, they often treat people differently. These practices amplify fear, suspicion, and a constant sense of being scrutinized.

Academic research also backs this up. Social psychology studies show that when foreignness becomes visible, whether through a

person's name, appearance, or government-issued ID card, immigrant communities face higher levels of prejudice. The research is clear. When markers of difference become official, discrimination becomes easier.

Bill 10 is a mask hiding prejudice behind policy. Everyday interactions become more unequal, from renting a home, to dealing with police, to asking for basic services. Sociologists have also documented how citizenship- or nationality-based distinctions often overlap with race, ethnicity, religion, and language. That means permanent residents, refugees, long-term migrants, even internationally trained workers, people who already live here legally, pay taxes here, raise their children here, can end up facing the same kind of discrimination as undocumented people. When you create a visible label, society uses it, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, and sorts people into categories of belonging and exclusion.

7:40

Mr. Speaker, let me turn to the second issue of the bill, section 6. This is not a minor housekeeping clause; it directly impacts health care access in Alberta. Until now Albertans have never had to pay simply to renew any document to access health care. Health care has always been understood as a universal right, something you receive because you are a human being in need, not because you have money in your pockets. But under section 6, Albertans will have to pay to renew an ID card tied to accessing health care. This government has introduced a cost barrier to our health care system. This government has not removed red tape; they have added blue tape to something as fundamental as health services. The blue tape grows thicker day by day, and Albertans are getting tangled in it.

Health care in this province must never depend on your bank account, your citizenship label, or your ability to pay for a licence renewal. Health care is a right, not a commodity. It is not for sale to private interests, not a playground for ideological experiments, and not something that should ever be restricted by bureaucratic barriers. Health care belongs to the people of Alberta, not to the UCP, not to Sam Mraiche, and not to their corporate donors. It must remain accessible to everyone in every corner of this province, and at every time they need it, without fear, without cost barriers, and without discrimination. When we have universal health care, we attract investments; we attract talent; we attract a brighter future.

This brings me to my third point, Mr. Speaker. My colleague, my friend and a true advocate of immigrant issues, the Member for Edmonton-Decore proposed a motion last session that companies in Alberta should not be asking for Canadian work experience. The UCP voted that down, and in the morning I gave them three shames. Here is the fourth one for voting against that motion.

In this bill the UCP had the opportunity to fix their past mistake. They did not. Instead of enforcing this on all companies and all employers, this government is confining it to regulatory bodies. This does not help anyone, Mr. Speaker. After doing all of this, this UCP government is not even apologizing for that. This government is not even talking to the stakeholders. This government is not even talking to the immigrant communities about how they feel about this bill. Instead of that, they are just ramming it through, and this is unacceptable.

Every time the minister of service Alberta stands up, he explains how this bill is not discriminatory. Mr. Speaker, the last person I want to hear from about whether I or people like me will face discrimination after this bill is the minister of service Alberta. If you care about antiracism, if you genuinely care about antiracism, how about taking your Bill 13 back and restoring diversity, equity, and inclusion in regulatory professional bodies? How about

including antiracism curriculum in schools? If you cannot do that, do not lecture us on discrimination.

Mr. Speaker, as I speak, I am reminded of words from former UN General Secretary António Guterres: refugees and immigrants are not the problem; they are often the first victims of the problem. Bills like this are the problem. Ideas to segregate communities are the problem. UCP politics, UCP policies, UCP priorities are the problem, but we can fix this. On behalf of Alberta's New Democrats, I want to speak directly to every immigrant family of the province. You are as equal as anyone else. You are the beating heart of the province. You are the strongest thread in the fabric that holds this province together. Whether your grandparents arrived 100 years ago, whether you landed last month, and even if your plane just touched the ground just moments ago, this is your province. In fact, you are the province.

Here's our promise to all those immigrants, Mr. Speaker: we will stand up for you, we will speak up for you, and we will fight for you. We will not allow your education, your health care, your future to be gambled with by this UCP government because, unlike those four UCP characters that I introduced in the beginning – Everybody, Somebody, Nobody, and Anybody – the Alberta New Democrats will get things done for immigrant communities. We will protect your rights, we will defend your dignity, and we will build an Alberta where everyone belongs without exception.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now move third reading of Bill 10, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2).

I encourage all members to support this important legislation. Thank you.

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

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That was generous of the minister to move third reading of the bill after sending us home this afternoon, invoking a couple of closure motions, more to come. It's nice to see someone willing to get up and speak to their bill. Kudos to you, Minister.

The Speaker: Through the chair, please.

Mr. Sabir: Although there is not much in this bill that the minister or the government will be proud of, [interjections] one of the things . . .

The Speaker: Both sides through the chair, and only one person should be speaking.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and always through you to the members.

The bill has six pieces of legislation that it amends, and, as my colleague mentioned, it includes some solutions that are in search of problems, including citizenship markers on drivers' licences.

Mr. Speaker, when we were in government, I was responsible for social services, and one of the programs I was responsible for was the AISH program. That AISH program application form was some 22, 23 pages long. It was a three-step program, where you get a form about general eligibility, then you get a form about financial eligibility, and then you were given the form about your medical eligibility. At that point the then Auditor General released a report urging the government to look into this program, its processes, its forms, application process, and we sure did look into that.

One of the learnings from that exercise was that when we sought input from the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, one of the things that the commissioner mentioned was that this form was too long and that the basic principle of government service delivery is that you don't collect more information than you need to deliver a program. That's the basic principle. So we looked at this form through that lens, the most information that you strictly need to deliver this program. We were able to combine all three applications into one and make it a fair bit shorter. The principle and the lens we were looking at it through was that the government has no business collecting more information than they need to deliver the service.

A driver's licence is just there to confirm that people have gone through the training, people have gone through the test, and they are able to drive a vehicle in a safe manner and in accordance with the traffic safety rules. There can be no justification whatsoever that the government needs to put people's citizenship status on those licences. It doesn't make this service, make this government program any better; rather, there may be many unintended consequences of giving that information, putting that information on the driver's licence. It's not just us saying that; many people across this province have raised alarms over the government's choice to include citizenship markers on drivers' licences.

7:50

Lately, starting from their throne speech, the government has turned up their anti-immigrant rhetoric as well. In question period, quite frankly, their answers kind of use the language that we need the right kind of immigrants, those kinds of things. And when that kind of rhetoric comes from people in positions of power, that has consequences. Just to distract people from their failures, just to distract from their record, the government is just flooding the zone with anything and everything that will help them distract, and that's one of those things.

If the government was serious about governing, if the government was serious about listening to Albertans, they would listen to Albertans who are opposed to this, who are warning this government of the serious consequences that could follow this inclusion of citizenship markers. The government claims that this may somehow help them with the administration of elections.

Ms Hoffman: Ridiculous.

Mr. Sabir: That's quite ridiculous. You only are able to vote if your name is on that citizenship registry, that's maintained by the federal government. They usually have strict rules on who can vote; ID requirements, address requirements, all those things are there. Prior to this they got rid of many things, vouching and added provisions, that, I guess, amount to voter suppression and whatnot. And now they're claiming that somehow this will make voting better. Nothing could be further from the truth.

They are also making changes to the All-season Resorts Act, essentially expanding its definition to include private lands as well. Again, that's the project that the government announced a few months ago. They never announce anything after completing their homework; they just kind of make things up as they go. Now, somehow, they thought that this was needed and necessary to administer this program. Again, the government is failing and refusing to listen to Albertans and their concerns on this particular issue. That is the party who sometimes gets up and defends private property and private rights and all those things, but in practice they are doing everything exactly the opposite.

Then there are amendments to the Fair Registration Practices Act. In 2019, as soon as they took over, this legislation was passed

by the government and, at that point, they claimed that somehow this would revolutionize how foreign credentials are assessed in this country, and that would help people to reach their full potential by being able to practise in the profession of their choice, which they are trained for. At that time the minister of multiculturalism helped immigrants submit and talked about it pretty much every year. Six years later we are in exactly the same place where we started.

In between they also passed legislation, a private member's bill, to strike a committee to look into it after passing this legislation. There were some more changes, but the fact remains that there are many barriers that are facing professional immigrants, and they're held back by design and not able to practise in the choice of their profession that they're trained for. I don't think that this government is serious about addressing that at all.

There was one health professional, a doctor from India; I ran into him while door-knocking in one of the neighbourhoods, Savanna, and he told me that he is in touch with the minister of health over his credentials and explained to me how he should be able to practise. Some other provinces are allowing him to, but not Alberta. He had some family connection in Alberta and wanted to stay here. Later on he gave up and moved to Nova Scotia and got accepted there. He's now practising there in Nova Scotia. He sent me an e-mail that there were 11 people, 11 medical professionals, picked up by Nova Scotia, and out of those 11, nine of them were those who were rejected by Alberta.

Clearly, this province is not interested in fixing health care by giving people an opportunity to get their credentials verified and be able to practise. All along their plan is to dismantle public health care, all along their plan is to bring in American-style, Trump-style health care, and Bill 11 clearly shows that. Otherwise, if they wanted to add more doctors, there is ample opportunity. There are enough qualified candidates in our communities that are trained for medical professions and that are able to practise given the opportunity. Again, that change won't make that big of a difference.

Then the new thing, again, with respect to health care: this government will not let go of any opportunity where they could put roadblocks in people's way to access health care. Now, somehow, they thought that it's a good idea to require people to renew their health cards every five years. Again, there is no rationale. That's why the government was not able to provide any such rationale. That is just something, again, the government is doing in bad faith to ramp up their rhetoric, anti-immigrant rhetoric, that somehow they might be able to discriminate against people based on their citizenship and permanent resident status. There is a thing called the Charter, section 15. People will challenge those kinds of things, but the government is more interested in these legal battles than in addressing issues facing Albertans.

In short, like any other bill that this minister has presented, it's not a very well thought out bill. The changes contained in it do not address the priorities of Albertans and they don't make any difference. Instead, the government should focus on access to health care, addressing the cost-of-living crisis, access to education, public safety; things that matter to Albertans, things that Albertans share with us and I'm sure with the other side as well, that they want their government to focus on.

Again, I urge all members to think about these changes, reflect on these changes. Third reading is exactly for that purpose, that we look at the bill, how it affects different stakeholder Albertans, and vote against this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this evening to speak to issues related to Bill 10 and talk about some of the effects that they are having on people in this province, not only immigrants but people who are watching from every corner of this province who have lived there all their life and are aghast at what this bill is proposing to do in a number of ways.

Of course, it does a number of different things. It's an omnibus bill that changes the Government Organization Act which allows for displaying of citizenship markers on licences, which has been alluded to by my colleague from Calgary-North East as well as Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, who spoke quite eloquently about the effects it will have on the immigrant population.

I hesitate to follow up on my friend from Calgary-North East's signature nomenclature, but he talked about Somebody, Anybody, and Nobody. It kind of reminds me of the Newfoundland ditty *We're Buddy Wasiname and the Other Fellers*. That's what it reminds me of, where people are looking at each other and questioning whether or not this citizenship marker is aimed at them and wondering, indeed, whether they belong or not.

8:00

If you really take a moment, Mr. Speaker, to imagine yourself in a lineup at your local grocery store or your hardware store and a person needs to take out their identification to make a purchase or if you're at a hotel in a lineup and there's a hesitation on the part of the person who's in front of you in line talking to the hotel registration clerk because he knows that somebody in behind may be looking and just getting a glance at his driver's licence to see perhaps if indeed he is actually a Canadian or not — it's got c-a-n written on the driver's licence if indeed you are a Canadian — it's that type of daily occurrence that we are subjecting people to in this province in a blatant, clear-cut effort to create division amongst people in the province. There can be no other explanation for it that's logical to me.

When I think about that daily occurrence of simply handing over your driver's licence to provide identification in so many cases where it's necessary, what it must feel like to an individual who doesn't have that Canadian identity marker on their driver's licence to wonder about who's looking, who's watching, who's making judgments upon them: that indeed should send a chill down the spine of every Albertan, every Canadian, to know that now, for the first time in the province of Alberta, in any Canadian province, we are putting a nationality marker on our driver's licence. For what actual purpose? Lord only knows, Mr. Speaker. There's no real clear-cut purpose that's justifiable that the government has come forward with. They're pretty lame, weak excuses about the reasoning behind this. The individual excuses that have been given by the Premier in debate have been to suggest that people who were not entitled to government benefits may be less likely to request them.

The fact that you would have to have an option to put your health care number on your driver's licence as part of this program is something that's equally offensive. First of all, it creates a dual system of health care card, which is a huge boondoggle of red tape in my mind, how in the heck that's going to work where you have somebody who opts to get their health care number on their driver's licence and then others who choose not to do that. You have two separate health care cards, two separate columns of bureaucracy. That in and of itself begs some question as to who thought up that idea.

On top of that, Mr. Speaker, you're ending up having a security question about all these documents. The Privacy Commissioner was asked about and reported her concerns over citizenship details on drivers' licences. In an article CBC News published, she talks about

the concerns that she has. It was noted in the article that the Premier said that the change was about protecting our democracy and how it would preserve the integrity and security of elections, and it later pointed out in the article that there was a total of three cases of fraud, people who were not eligible to vote by way of citizenship. Three cases total in the whole province in the last election. So that argument doesn't hold any water whatsoever.

Another fact that it is interesting to note is that Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba, and B.C. all once featured enhanced drivers' licences that listed citizenship but have since discontinued issuing them. The enhanced drivers' licences were optional and intended to expedite travel to the U.S. So four provinces have already tried this and then given up on it, got rid of the practice.

The Privacy Commissioner, Diane McLeod, goes on to say in her remarks about the intended implementation by the government of the citizenship markers on drivers' licences that "citizenship can be sensitive information and, keeping in mind that driver's licences are often used as proof of age in many locations, the government would have to demonstrate how any benefit of having that information included on a driver's licence would outweigh the privacy risks," McLeod wrote." She goes on to say that it's unclear how the inclusion of citizenship markers will benefit Albertans. Mr. Speaker, I share that question, that concern, as to what, in fact, the benefit would be of putting it on. I see a lot of negatives, but I certainly see no benefit, and the government has not come up with any reasonable explanation to me.

The Privacy Commissioner goes on to say, and this is important, that

it is not clear whether the provincial government as a public body is allowed to collect that type of personal information . . .

It's not clear whether the government is allowed to collect that type of personal information.

. . . which requires authorization by the Protection of Privacy Act, adding that her office has not yet received a privacy impact assessment.

Indeed, it may be, Mr. Speaker, that the government is in violation of the conduct expected in terms of the office of the Privacy Commissioner. "A privacy impact assessment," the article goes on to say, "helps to identify and address possible privacy and security risks that could occur when personal or health information is processed, according to the information and the privacy commissioner's website."

To quote the Privacy Commissioner once again, she says, "I would say that there is absolutely an overwhelming need for us . . . to ensure that the programs that we offer are being accessed by Canadian citizens, and that we can demonstrate that to the Auditor General." Sorry; I misspoke. That was the Premier saying that the overwhelming need is there to ensure the programs are being offered to Canadian citizens and that they are entitled and that we can demonstrate that to the Auditor General as an excuse to try to support the implementation of the national markers on our drivers' licences.

The concerns that the Privacy Commissioner brings forward are something we should be taking very, very seriously. In another recent instance, Mr. Speaker, the same Privacy Commissioner talked about a situation where the Edmonton Police Service failed to obtain approval or wait for feedback from her office before launching a pilot program that uses facial recognition technology in police body cameras. The police dispute the need for that. However, in quoting on that issue, the Privacy Commissioner, in an article, emphasized that any activity that involves the collection, use, or disclosure of personal information is subject to the law and requires a full privacy assessment process. That was in relation to use by police of body cameras which had a facial recognition capability in

a very recent announcement, and it begs the question, Mr. Speaker, how indeed the Privacy Commissioner must feel about this implementation of the citizenship markers on drivers' licences, which she also claims was implemented or brought forward, announced without any discussion with her, without any prior consultation.

It shows a pattern, Mr. Speaker, of disrespect for our legislative officers that I think has really been demonstrated in recent committee meetings as well, shocking displays of disregard for the professionalism that our legislative officers show year in and year out. Indeed, once again we've seen it here with respect to the nonconsultation with the Privacy Commissioner with respect to the citizenship markers on the drivers' licences.

One would have expected, if nothing more than a simple courtesy, to run this by the Privacy Commissioner, even on the off chance that it might be required. One would have thought that even if not legally required, the prudent thing to do by the minister would have been to consult with the Privacy Commissioner on the efficacy of the program and on the wider effects that this might have on the population and, indeed, what consequences there could be from a privacy standpoint and a security standpoint of the people involved, who are either having the Canadian citizenship marker or not, Mr. Speaker.

It may be, given the type of issues that some Canadians are having even crossing the American border right now, that to have that marker on your driver's licence may have some consequence in being involved in a traffic stop in an American state. That might cause you some difficulty.

8:10

There's unnecessary bureaucracy being created, and the explanations that the government is trying to foist upon Albertans are really a crock of sauerkraut. The Premier's recent remarks in debate about Ukrainians being a supported immigrant population, Mr. Speaker, raised my ire and caused my blood to boil because I know that in years past immigrant populations from Ukraine and eastern Europe were very much chastised. I know that my relatives in the early 1900s suffered the indignity of discrimination, and they were often called the very derogative term of "bohunks," stateless people. Stateless people is what they were called even though they were here on the invitation of the Canadian government, many of them to become Canadian citizens. I suppose the Premier would have described them as not the right kind of immigrants back then, but somehow the diaspora now, of course, is supporting the Ukrainians and the Premier is saying that they're the right kind of immigrants.

To have this distinction being made by the Premier, coupled with this implementation of the citizenship markers on their driver's licence, really creates a fear in immigrants, who are here now wondering whether or not they're the right kind, whether or not they're welcome in Alberta, Mr. Speaker. That is a gut-wrenching question to think that people have in their minds when they're simply trying to do their best to survive in this economy right now. Having come from another country, doing what they can to go through the hoops to gain their permanent residence and ultimately citizenship but to fear every time they have to go to a cash register or to a government registry or any place where their driver's licence is required to be displayed: it makes me shudder to think about what people are feeling when they're having to expose their citizenship to a clerk or anybody who happens to be standing behind them and wondering what, indeed, judgments are being made about their nationality as they stand in that lineup.

Also, if indeed you're making an application for any type of employment. I mean, if you have to present your driver's licence

for that, are you put onto a second pile or maybe disregarded because you're not a Canadian citizen? It opens the door, Mr. Speaker, for unbridled discrimination against those who happen to not be Canadian citizens as displayed on their driver's licence. It's a totally unnecessary addition to the document that does damage to the respect that we should be showing our immigrant population.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for . . .

Mr. Stephan: Weak.

The Speaker: Member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie is who we should hear from.

Mr. Gurtej Brar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I met a young doctor from the Philippines. She has been in Alberta for the last three years. She passed every exam. She wants to work in the hospital, but she cannot because the rule says she misses Canadian experience. She drives for a food delivery app at night to pay rent. That same week this government introduced Bill 10 and spent hours in this House talking about putting a citizenship label on drivers' licences and letting rich tourists shoot fenced elk. She asked me: why are they fixing things that are not even broken and ignoring the things that are breaking us? And here we are again debating Bill 10, an omnibus bill. This bill is not about cutting red tape. It is about cutting decency. It is about cutting fairness. It is about cutting the future of this province. It changes six different laws at the same time, and the UCP hopes no one will notice. It is our job to make sure everyone notices what they are doing.

One, a citizenship marker on every single driver's licence: in late 2026 when you renew your licence, the card will tell the world whether you are a Canadian citizen or not. Alberta will stand alone. Every other province in Canada that ever did this: Ontario quit, Quebec quit, Manitoba quit, British Columbia quit. They quit because it cost millions of dollars and fixed zero real problems.

The Premier said this is about election integrity. The claim is laughable. Elections Alberta found only three – three – ineligible votes in Alberta in an entire 2023 election, Mr. Speaker, three votes in a province of four and a half million people. This government is ready to spend millions of dollars and brand millions of lawful residents to stop three mistakes. That is not policy. That's fearmongering dressed up as legislation.

The Premier also says the marker will make it easier to restrict service to citizens only. Let me be crystal clear. There is not a single program in Alberta that is legally only for citizens. Not health care. Not education. Not driver's licences. Permanent residents, refugees, and work-permit holders pay every cent of provincial tax that citizens pay. They have every right to every service we fund together. Why does this government want every bartender, every landlord, every corner store clerk to know who is a citizen and who is not? The answer is ugly. The answer is discrimination made easy.

Citizenship is not a protected ground under the Alberta Human Rights Act. Once the marker is on the card, a landlord can legally say: sorry; citizens only. A bar can legally say: sorry; citizens only. An employer can legally say: sorry; citizens only. That's the core point, Mr. Speaker.

Newcomers keep this province alive. Remember Alberta Calling? They staff our hospitals at night. They frame our house in the cold. They cook our food. They care for the parents. They pay taxes so your kids can go to school, and this government wants to put a scarlet letter on them. Shame on every member who votes for that.

Number two, Mr. Speaker: canned hunting. This bill rips up the long-standing ban on shooting farmed elk and deer inside fences.

They have a fancy name now, called “harvest preserve.” You hand over cash. You walk through a gate. You shoot an animal that has nowhere to run. That is not hunting. This is slaughter with a selfie at the end. Twenty-three years ago Premier Ralph Klein looked at the same idea and said that it is abhorrent. Eighty-five per cent of Albertans thought it was wrong. He said it was not consistent with hunting as a sport. He killed the idea. Today the UCP government is digging up and breathing life into it.

Real hunters hate this. The Alberta Fish and Game Association hates this. The Alberta Wilderness Association hates this. Boone and Crockett Club, the people who keep the record book for fair chase trophies will not even record kills from these pens. Ethical hunters call it shooting fish in a barrel. I call it disgusting.

8:20

There is a bigger danger than ethics. Chronic wasting disease is already out of control in Alberta wild herds. Year after year the infection rate climbs. The very first case ever recorded in this province was on a game farm. When you pack hundreds of elk and deer behind one fence, disease explodes. Wild deer walk up to the fence. They touch their nose. They share saliva. They die. One day science may prove that this disease can jump to humans who eat the meat. We do not have proof yet, but every expert says that the risk is growing. The elk farming industry is shrinking fast. Twenty years ago there were more than 600 farms. Today there are roughly 130 remaining. The market has spoken. Albertans have spoken. Now the UCP says: we don’t care; we will risk the wild herds to serve a dying industry that donates to our party. That’s not leadership.

Number two, a blank cheque for one minister. The bill folds private land into the All-season Resorts Act. Suddenly just one minister can fast-track massive private, luxury developments with almost no public input and almost no environmental review. Water, wildlife, and public access lose; connected developers win. That’s not red tape reduction. This is red carpet for insiders.

Let me be fair. There is one small thing in the bill that is good, Mr. Speaker. It even touches on the very important issue of foreign credentials but does not go far enough to address anything. The UCP brags about this. Well, it’s calling for a practice that already exist. It does not ask employers to stop requiring Canadian experience to address the overqualification issue that is costing our economy and our progress. The Alberta New Democrats forced this government’s hand with Motion 511 in 2024. Mr. Speaker, the UCP likes to copy stuff from the south of the border, but this time I ask them to copy our Motion 511. We will not mind it.

Anyway, they are doing it late, but they are doing something. That’s good. If they fully implement Alberta New Democrats’ Motion 511, it can put hundreds of doctors and nurses into our hospitals faster. We applaud that part, but good policy does not justify evil policy. You do not get to say: we will only let you doctor if you also accept a citizenship label that can ruin your family’s life. That is blackmailing, Mr. Speaker.

Albertans are struggling right now. Groceries are brutal. Rent is brutal. People wait 12, 15, 20 hours in emergency rooms. Kids learn in overcrowded portables while this government brags about surplus. This is what people talk about when I knock on doors. They do not talk about imaginary voter fraud. They do not beg for canned hunting. They do not ask for faster ski chalets for billionaires.

This bill shows exactly where this government’s heart is. It would rather tattoo “foreigner” on nurses than let the nurse treat Albertan patients. It would rather watch wild deer waste away from the zombie disease than tell a handful of elk farmers: no. It would rather waste millions on plastic labels than hire one single new doctor for a rural hospital.

To every UCP backbencher who still looks into the mirror in the morning: if you vote for this bill, your name goes on the label, too. Every time a newcomer is refused an apartment because of that card, your name is on it. Every time a wild deer drops dead from CWD because this government opened the door, your name is on it. Every time a minister rubber stamps a shady resort deal in the dark, your name is on it. You will carry that shame for the rest of your political life. Your kids will read about it one day. Your grandchildren will ask why.

You still have a choice. Stand up. Vote no. Kill the bill. Take the two good ideas, put them in a clean bill tomorrow, and we will pass it the same afternoon. But this bill is hateful, reckless. This corrupt bill must die here. Albertans are watching. Newcomers are watching. Hunters are watching. Wildlife is depending on us. History is watching. Fifteen seconds of courage today will save Alberta years of regret tomorrow. Vote no. Kill the bill. Do it now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: No speakers?

On third reading of Bill 10 would the mover like to close?

Mr. Nally: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 14 Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 14, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2025.

Albertans expect a democratic system that is open, strong, and trustworthy, and our government has always encouraged Albertans to engage directly in their democracy, whether through voting or participating in citizen initiative proposals. That’s why we brought forward Bill 14 to ensure our democratic processes are clear, fair, and to ensure that Albertans can participate when they want to.

Mr. Speaker, we’ve recently seen concerning examples in Canada of ballots being overwhelmed with protest candidates, individuals who really have no intention of being actually elected and representing their community but rather to disrupt the process. In one recent federal by-election we saw over 200 people put their names on a ballot. Many had the same exact financial officer and many of the same group of electors signing the same nomination papers. This is not a partisan issue. Former Chief Electoral Officer Jean-Pierre Kingsley has gone so far as to call these types of practices, quote, an abuse of process.

Now, Bill 14 introduces measured and reasonable safeguards to help prevent similar abuses in Alberta. First, the bill increases the number of signatures required when it comes to signing nomination papers from 25 to 100. This ensures that candidates seeking to appear on a ballot have a meaningful level of support from their community. Second, it prohibits electors from signing nomination papers for more than one candidate in the same contest. Now, these two changes work hand in hand to ensure that nomination signatures genuinely reflect confidence in the candidate’s legitimacy and intention to serve.

Mr. Speaker, these reforms do not limit participation. They preserve space on the ballot for serious candidates, and they deter co-ordinated efforts to distract or overwhelm voters. Elections must

be accessible, but they must also be meaningful and the integrity of ballots must be upheld.

Bill 14 also includes changes that will help ensure Albertans know precisely which party they're voting for when they go to the polls. Democracy works best, Mr. Speaker, when voters can fully understand who they're voting for and what those candidates represent. Now, there are people out there who want to piggyback on the goodwill of the term "conservative," for example, to convince them into voting for them. This is, again, a nonpartisan issue. I know that all members in this House would agree that they would not want another party formed that sounds exactly like their own. Nobody here wants another party registered as the Alberta democratic party or the new liberal party, for example. I think that we can all agree on that.

8:30

This year we've seen multiple citizen initiative petitions brought forward by Albertans as well. When a citizen submits a proposal, we want to ensure that the process is free from delays, that it's transparent, and that the data collected is not misused. That's why we're proposing changes in Bill 14 that, if passed, would protect the privacy of individuals with increased penalties for the misuse of personal information when somebody signs a citizen initiative petition.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

It's also why we're proposing changes that, if passed, would protect the privacy of individuals, with increased penalties for the misuse of personal information when someone does sign a citizen initiative petition. Now, Mr. Speaker, the penalties will increase. They'll go from \$50,000 to \$500,000 for individuals and \$500,000 to \$1 million for corporations that misuse private information. Of course, if convicted, an individual would be disqualified from making a petition application in the future, from serving as a chief financial officer, and registering as a third party under the Citizen Initiative Act. There will also be new ID verification requirements for canvassers when collecting signatures.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I will wrap up here shortly, but I want to touch on a few pieces of Bill 14 intended to promote collaboration and shared priorities with Alberta's legal community. This past summer we entered into a brand new and monumental governance agreement with Legal Aid Alberta. This agreement establishes clear terms for renewals, and it ensures that legal aid services remain sustainable and accessible for those who need them most. Bill 14 amends the Legal Profession Act to reference this updated governance agreement. Access to legal aid is a cornerstone of a fair and functioning justice system. It ensures that low-income Albertans are not left without representation or support. The amendments in Bill 14 reinforce our government's commitment to a strong and reliable legal aid system that helps Albertans wherever they need it.

In addition to Legal Aid, Bill 14 strengthens the governance structure of the Alberta Law Foundation, which is an organization that provides funding for a wide range of legal services and programs. Now, these programs and supports, whether they involve legal education, family law support, or community legal clinics, play a vital role here in our province. By improving the governance of the foundation, we will ensure that the funds continue to be used responsibly, transparently, and for the benefit of those who rely on affordable legal services.

Finally, Mr. Speaker Bill 14 includes a practical but meaningful amendment to help improve court capacity across our province. Under the current framework justices of the peace serve an initial 10-year term. Bill 14 allows experienced justices of the peace to

apply for an additional five-year term. This simple change will help minimize delays. It'll improve turnover rates and timing-out issues, and it will ensure that Albertans have timely access to justice. Expanding the ability of qualified justices of the peace to continue serving our court system is a good thing for everybody.

Mr. Speaker, taken together the changes in Bill 14 form an integral effort to reinforce democratic participation, protect the personal information of individual Albertans, improve and enhance Legal Aid, and increase court capacity, and that has an impact on every single Albertan's life. It helps to ensure that the tools are available, of course, to Albertans to continue to reflect fairness, clarity, and integrity.

I urge all members to support Bill 14. Again, I move second reading. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any others? The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to have an opportunity to be able to speak to Bill 14. It's becoming a bit of a luxury to be able to debate in this House on bills that are important to Albertans, so I'm privileged to have the opportunity. I will say that I do believe the Minister of Justice really buried the lead on Bill 14 in his introduction of it in second reading.

I think if we were to describe what this bill is really about, it is that this bill represents just how scared the UCP government is. They are scared of opposition, they are scared of competition, they are scared of their base, they are scared of the courts, they are scared of the rule of law, and they are scared of Albertans. They believe the laws of this province are just rules of a game that they get to control and they get to change and rewrite as many times as they want to suit their needs and to suppress that opposition and that competition in the voices of Albertans. It centralizes an almost absurd amount of authority with the Minister of Justice over the legal profession and democracy while also giving himself personal immunity from being held to the standards of that very legal profession.

Let's get started talking a little bit about the elements of this bill, Mr. Speaker. Let's begin with their changes to the Citizen Initiative Act, which is really, clearly, absolutely an indicator of how scared the Premier and the UCP government are of their base. All the changes that we're seeing here made to the Citizen Initiative Act are done because there is a strong and very loud faction of the UCP party who are very upset that they don't get to get the separatist referendum that they want, or they may not. That's why the Premier and the government have acquiesced to this group of people, to make sure that they get the petition and referendum that they want.

Now let's be clear. What I find really interesting about the debate or the rationale, limited to date, that we've heard from government members and ministers – you know, they talk about how they don't want gatekeeping and they want citizens' initiative referendums to be as permissive as possible. The irony is, Mr. Speaker, that the very rules that they're decrying right now, the ones that are apparently so unfair, are the rules that this government put in place. The Citizen Initiative Act was only passed four years ago in 2021 with full support of the UCP members and clearly outlined the very rules that now this government is claiming are so unfair.

The other irony, Mr. Speaker, is that not only was this bill only introduced four years ago by this very government, but they've amended it twice since then and yet maintained the same rules that they're now saying are so unfair. What has changed in the meantime is that a group of their supporters, an ardent group of their supporters, weren't able to and don't want to follow the rules that the UCP set, so the UCP said: "Don't worry about it. We'll change

the rules for you, O select member of our base who we want to keep happy. The laws of this province are ours to shape and change as we will, and we want to keep you happy, so we're happy to change the laws of this province to do that."

I want to remind this government that back in 2020 the UCP government at the time established the Select Special Democratic Accountability Committee, comprised of many members who are still part of the UCP government now, including several members of the cabinet such as the Government House Leader, the Minister of Finance, the minister of agriculture, the Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women. All of them were on this committee, which actually put forward recommendations around making sure, for example, that any citizen initiative petition must not contravene the Charter of Rights or treaty rights. That was actually a recommendation that came from that committee, dominated by members who are still part of this cabinet, and they passed that.

They introduced Bill 51, and all – I can't even, I could list. Actually, maybe I will, Mr. Speaker. I will list the number of UCP MLAs and ministers on that side who happily passed Bill 51, the Citizen Initiative Act, which contained all the rules that they're now saying are so unfair. Those ministers: the minister of environment, the Minister of Justice, the minister of agriculture, the minister of service Alberta, the minister of transportation, the minister of affordability, the minister of public safety, the minister of education, the Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women, the Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services, the Minister of Finance, the minister of child and family services, the minister of hospitals, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, and the Minister of Infrastructure plus seven backbenchers.

You might be shocked to find out, Mr. Speaker, that that's still not all of the UCP cabinet because there's so many cabinet ministers. I listed all of them. That's still not all of them, but a good chunk of them, as you can hear, actually supported the very rules that they're now stomping their feet about, saying that it is completely unfair. No. What's unfair is that they are willing to change the laws that they've established to help keep their base happy.

8:40

Let's be clear. They're doing it because they actually wanted to end an active court action that is taking place right now. Under the authorities established by this government for citizen initiatives, which establishes that the CEO of Elections Alberta may refer a petition question to the court, a provision that by the way was just amended by this very government, not even the past UCP government but this government this spring as part of Bill 54 – I think it's like four or five months ago – this UCP government reiterated the authority in the Citizen Initiative Act for the CEO of Elections Alberta to refer a matter to the court to determine whether or not a petition question violates the Charter or treaty rights.

What's changed in a few months? Oh, right. I remember. A petition initiative led by the base of the Premier's party: their question got sent to court by the CEO of Elections Alberta. That, Mr. Speaker, is why only a few months later, this UCP government is saying that the very legislation that they say, "It should be permissive and should be allowing all these things to happen; it's so unfair," the very legislation that they just passed and amended four months ago is no longer fair. Maybe it's only because it's not fair for the small group of people that the Premier needs to keep happy.

Now, you know, a lot has been made about the decision from Justice Feasby, who ruled on this matter because, of course, Bill 14 is not law yet, so that court action is still very much alive. In his decision Justice Feasby said quite clearly, "The legal consequence

of discontinuing this proceeding prior to a decision would be to silence the Court. Legislating an end to litigation is extraordinary." He also said:

Changing legislation to circumvent a valid legal process commenced by the independent officer of the Legislative Assembly responsible for administering democratic processes is the antithesis of the stable, predictable, and ordered society that the rule of law contemplates, and democracy demands.

Mr. Speaker, that's because as we now know, as we see, this government is not interested in protecting the rule of law. In fact, they are actively undermining it. We heard some incredibly, incredibly disturbing rhetoric come from the Premier today in question period which seemed to undermine our very constitutional democracy, the rule of law that we have in this province, which says that the courts have an important role to play to interpret and apply laws. Very significantly, something that all Albertans should care deeply about, the courts are also there to make sure that government acts in accordance with the law. They are not above the law.

We heard the Premier today use rhetoric that we've heard before. Many of us will be very familiar. We heard it from Donald Trump over and over and over again, and it appears there is nothing from down south that this Premier and this government will not import into Alberta politics and into our Alberta political system. They are importing this idea of unelected judges making decisions. That's actually our legal system. We don't want judges to be elected because judges should be nonpartisan. They should be impartial. That's what's so important about having a judiciary. They get appointed by Conservative governments. They get appointed by Liberal governments. They get appointed by all governments, but judges play an important role as a check and balance on the majority faction of a democratic government.

This is a system that goes back and forth, and the absolute arrogance with which this government believes they are entitled to make rules and laws because they have the majority number of seats in this House – I'll remind you, Mr. Speaker, that this party, the governing party, only had 52.6 per cent of the popular vote in this last election, but they're acting as if they had 100 per cent. They're acting as if they have the authority above everybody else to make decisions over every Albertan's life and to overrule the rule of the courts.

Mr. Speaker, that is why we have a court system. That's why all evolved democracies have a court system, to be that check and balance on the executive power and on majority governments. The government might not like that, but that is the understanding of our parliamentary system and of our constitutional democracy. It's the core of that.

I wanted to also talk a little bit about political party names. Now, Mr. Speaker, this is where we shall see just how scared this government is of political competition. The fact of the matter is that this government can't keep the members of their own party happy. They have trouble fulfilling the obligations that go behind being a Conservative government.

Instead of actually doing the work to listen to Albertans and – yes, let's be clear. There are many, many Albertans who believe themselves to traditionally be conservatives, but I know – I'm certain all of my colleagues have had this experience; I'm certain some of the members on the other side have had this experience – that when you go around and you talk to Albertans they may say, "Yes, I traditionally believe myself to be a conservative, but I don't see this government as conservative at all." They say this over and over and over again. They say that the foundations of conservatism are not reflected at all in the way that this government acts. In fact, I've had conversations with certain members on the other side, the government side, who agree with that as well, who have indicated

that the core principles of conservatism, whether it be respect for institutions, respect for the rule of law, respect for individual rights, respect for property rights, respect for things moving in an incremental fashion and not being dramatic: those are things that are tenets of the conservatives' values.

But rather than respond to the fact that Albertans, and I'm certain some of the members of the government's party, would like to see more of those values reflected in this government's decision: no, they don't do that, Mr. Speaker. Instead what they do is they just say, "Nobody else can call themselves conservative." The arrogance of a government saying that they have the sole, exclusive, proprietary right to a political ideology, to a value system as conservative is so ironic. It's the antithesis, actually, of conservatism. Free speech, the elements of individual rights: those are things that most people and those of us who have studied, many I'm sure on the other side have as well – they're traditional tenets of conservatism. No, they don't want to reflect any of that. Instead what they want to do is just keep anybody else from using the term "conservative."

Ms Hoffman: Entitlement.

Ms Pancholi: It's an incredible amount of – thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Glenora for also mentioning the entitlement, right? That's actually something that has brought down previous Conservative governments; it's that level of entitlement and that being out of touch. As the kids say, they need to touch grass a little bit. They need to find out what's actually happening in the hearts and minds of Albertans.

You know what that takes, Mr. Speaker? That takes hard work, and unfortunately that's not what the government is used to doing. That's not what this government wants to do at all. They don't want to do the hard work; they just want to ban other people from using a name rather than do the hard work of reflecting Albertans' values.

I want to talk a little bit about the rule of law, because what we see under Bill 14 is that this Minister of Justice is trying to make himself the most powerful Albertan in the province. The amount of power that he has consolidated under himself both in the changes to the Citizen Initiative Act and changes to the Legal Profession Act. He is consolidating more and more. I'm saying "he," Mr. Speaker, because this is an individual title and role that is taking on the responsibilities of both making bylaws for the Law Society of Alberta and for the Alberta Law Foundation.

The Minister of Justice is consolidating all this power and particularly when it comes to citizen-led initiatives. All of those checks and balances that these government members – when they were part of that Democratic Accountability Committee and when they passed Bill 51, all those checks and balances on making sure that citizen initiatives pass some certain fundamentals, for example requiring that a petition cannot contravene the Charter or treaty rights, requiring that a petition can't come forward that calls on the government of Alberta to do something that a Legislature cannot do. These are just fundamentals. Well, no longer are they going to have any of those checks and balances in place. Instead it's going to be up to the Minister of Justice to decide whether or not all of those things have been met – to actually have eliminated all those requirements – to see whether or not, for example, a petition that has come forward is the same as one that's already been brought forward. No longer is the independent office of Elections Alberta going to be making those determinations. It's all going to be the Minister of Justice. In fact, all the authority, the independence of the office of Elections Alberta has been undermined and it's now going to be fully under the control of the Minister of Justice to make those determinations.

I question, Mr. Speaker, why somebody who is consolidating so much power into the office of the Minister of Justice, the top lawyer in the province, does not want to also be subject to the professional standards of the legal profession. In fact, I have to say it's a little bit hard to understand given the wording in Bill 14 of the provision that grants the Minister of Justice immunity – not just the current Minister of Justice, but previous ones as well – from any actions around professional conduct under the legal standards of the Law Society of Alberta. I would suggest that for any member of this House to introduce a piece of legislation that specifically provides them as an individual in their role immunity actually has a conflict of interest in introducing that piece of legislation.

8:50

Frankly, I'm a little shocked that the Minister of Justice believes it is appropriate to introduce a bill that grants himself immunity as the Minister of Justice and does not see that there is an obvious conflict of interest, particularly not just by introducing it but by voting on it as well. I would like to say that I'm shocked by that, but I think we've seen that these are actions that we're getting used to seeing from this government. There are no clear boundaries, no clear picture at all, no clear eyes on that side around what is appropriate and what is not appropriate anymore. This is the same Minister of Justice, Mr. Speaker, who felt that there was no conflict of interest in failing to disclose to this House his relationship with Sam Mraiche while also continuing to be the spokesperson for this government and direct investigations into allegations related to his friend and family member Sam Mraiche.

I would say that there is arguably a very strong case to be made that the Minister of Justice should not be introducing legislation to protect himself and to provide immunity to himself in this Legislature.

Ms Hoffman: That's entitlement.

Ms Pancholi: Once again, as my colleague mentions, that is absolutely entitlement and potentially a conflict of interest.

Again, I think the lines have been so blurred by this government that they don't see it anymore. They just don't see it or, more importantly, Mr. Speaker, more concerning for Albertans, they simply don't care. All of these provisions are fundamentally showing that the government and the UCP believe that this province is their plaything, that they can make the rules up. They see it all as a game.

They want to continue to fuel rage politics by allowing petitions that would obviously violate the Charter of Rights, obviously violate treaty rights, that may even be outside the scope of the Legislature. They want those petitions to come forward and get people to get signatures and then be brought before this House. I sincerely doubt that this Premier, this government is going to be able to say, "Sorry," to those petition signatories who've met the threshold and then say, "We can't move forward on that because it's outside the scope of the Legislature. It's outside the scope of the Charter of Rights and treaty rights." That would allow them to put a damper on the rage politics that they have been farming in, Mr. Speaker, for the last few years, so they're continuing to sow chaos.

When the Premier and the government stand up and undermine our judicial system, our court system, they're undermining the very principles and the faith that Albertans have in our institutions. They may think that this is a fun game, Mr. Speaker. The government might think that they're winning the day on their certain arguments or fights or battles with whoever is to blame now. I guess because the government has now happily signed on to MOUs with the federal government and we've got the UCP-Liberal MOU that's

been signed, they don't have that bogeyman anymore, so now they're turning it to the courts. Now it's the courts. That's who's going to be the next blame.

We've heard that rhetoric already ramp up in this session repeatedly over and over again. We've seen them show a complete disregard for Albertans' Charter rights. They have been using preemptively the notwithstanding clause to override the individual rights of Albertans. They're saying that they don't believe in the courts. They don't believe in the rule of law, and fundamentally, Mr. Speaker, that is unconservative. That is a government that's not conservative; they are populist. They are a populist government that is making the rules up as they go along, and they're changing them constantly to serve not only their own needs but to serve the needs of their own political purposes. That is not governance. That is not something that Albertans can have trust in. That is craven, power-hungry, drunk-on-power actions by a government that is out of touch with the priorities of Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, at this point there's not even any much point to talk about how little debate they're going to allow on this bill by introducing it just a few days before the legislative session is scheduled to end. They knew that there would not be much debate on this. Every action this government is taking is showing a complete disregard for Albertans. It's about centralizing power amongst themselves. It's about using the laws as their own rules to play their own games.

But the end of this, Mr. Speaker, is going to be a set of laws that Albertans need to have trust in, and they can't have trust in these laws right now. So I think that the wise thing to do would be for every member of this Assembly to vote against Bill 14 because they believe in the rule of law, because they believe in the power of Albertans, because they're not afraid of competition and opposition.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Airdrie-Cochrane.

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to address a development so astonishing, so profoundly at odds with democratic norms that I am still in disbelief that it could ever be entertained in a legitimate democracy let alone happening here in Alberta. Bill 14, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, is not a modernization. It is a calculated consolidation of power dressed up as a reform. It begins with something so absurd, something so Orwellian that Albertans should be alarmed. This government is banning words, not banning corruption or waste or improving governance. No. They're banning words. Under Bill 14 Albertans are prohibited from forming a political party using certain words like conservative, Wildrose, democratic, even communist, and now combinations of words such as Progressive Conservative are effectively criminalized.

Now, let's be clear. When a government believes its survival depends on restricting vocabulary, something has gone seriously askew. Not one province in this country, including those the UCP loves to brand as authoritarian, has stooped to this level, threatening and suing political opponents without cause, dragging the Election Commissioner into court, and now drafting legislation to ban words simply to block a party from forming midstream.

Let's be clear. This is not about clarity for voters. That would be like saying that the Wyant report was about transparency and justice. No, this isn't about clarity; it's about insecurity. A truly confident Wildrose government wouldn't ban words. They'd compete on ideas. They'd defend their record. They'd trust Albertans to choose rather than insulting them by suggesting that they're not savvy enough to figure out which party to support. Instead, this government is rewriting the rules of democracy

midstream and doing so retroactively. The naming restrictions reach back to July 4, 2025, conveniently timed to target our efforts to revive the Progressive Conservative name, a proud tradition in Alberta erased with the stroke of a pen, a political identity wiped out.

Let's be honest. Albertans will never mistake a separatist UCP government for a Progressive Conservative. There is zero chance of that happening. Our position is simple. A legitimate, principled Conservative party stands in contrast to the divisive politics and separatist tendencies that we see from the UCP today. As for the UCP invoking the names of legacies of former Premiers like Lougheed and Klein, I'm sure that those ideas and words are certainly not proprietary. They belong to Albertans, not to the UCP. From my soul I can tell you that those Premiers would find the UCP's views and approach completely foreign to their way of thinking.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta was built on entrepreneurship, competition. Albertans value vigorous political debate. This Premier has often spoken about the importance of open dialogue and free expression. Words are cheap. To understand the UCP and their true motives, we must look at their actions. First, there's the notwithstanding, used initially to avoid losing an arbitration, as confirmed by the Member for West Yellowhead, and then stripped Charter rights from Albertans seeking to use the courts. Bill 34, introduced just before the health scandal erupted, dramatically reduced public access to government records. The professional governance act, dubbed the Jordan Peterson bill, undermines self-regulation in professions like medicine, engineering, and psychology based on the premise that politicians know better than professionals. Bill 20, the municipal statutes amendment act, grants the UCP sweeping authority to override municipal autonomy, cancel bylaws, and even remove elected officials from office. Bill 1, the sovereignty act, the starting point for Alberta's separation story. It empowers the UCP to bypass courts and undermine the rule of law.

Now Bill 14, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. It weakens democracy by stripping courts and the Election Commissioner of their role in safeguarding referendum questions, even those involving constitutionality. It silences grassroots voices by giving the UCP sole discretion to deny petitions. It hands this separatist government the power to approve an independence referendum, and of course it interferes with political competition by banning common political terms like "conservative."

Mr. Speaker, this isn't just one bill. It's a series of bills designed to centralize control, to sidestep the courts, and reshape Alberta's political landscape to the UCP's advantage. Bill 14 alone infringes on freedom of expression, freedom of association, the right to vote and stand as a candidate, independent oversight, political competition, and it concentrates powers in the UCP's cabinet.

9:00

The UCP knows that this bill won't survive a Charter or a constitutional challenge, but that doesn't matter because, in my opinion, they're calling an election. That's why they quietly dropped the recall provisions from Bill 14, because any successful petition would be wiped out by a general election and any that are in progress will dissolve the moment the writ is issued. They need an election in February before the Alberta Prosperity Project mobilizes, before they table a budget, and before the Auditor General delivers his report. Doug Wylie, I hope you are listening.

Mr. Speaker, there exists a significant and increasing segment of the population seeking a credible conservative alternative. They are expressing clear discomfort with what they are perceiving as the UCP's adoption of polarizing positions that do not align with their values. When a government feels compelled to restrict the very

vocabulary of democracy to maintain its grip on power, something has gone terribly wrong. As we've seen since the introduction of the sovereignty act, this isn't the beginning. It's the continuation of a deliberate plan to consolidate power.

Bill 14 dismantles independence where it matters most. It strips the electoral officer of authority and hands referendum oversight to the Justice minister. It halts ongoing court cases on constitutional questions. It removes the requirement that citizen-driven referenda comply with the Constitution before moving forward, and it gives the Minister of Justice sweeping discretion, not only to decide which questions proceed but even to rewrite them. This is not democratic governance. This is an Orwellian bureaucracy masquerading as a legitimate government.

But it doesn't stop there. Bill 14 reaches deep into Alberta's legal community, granting the minister immunity from sanctions for actions taken in office, an extraordinary and troubling change, Mr. Speaker. It places the Alberta Law Foundation, a body that has operated independently for decades, under direct ministerial control, allowing government to approve or reject its bylaws and to dictate its own directives. This is a pattern. We've gone from banning books to intervening in the courts before they've ruled to banning words to controlling referendums to controlling lawyers to controlling grants. Each step concentrates power. Each step erodes independence. Each step makes a mockery of Alberta's claim to be strong and free.

Albertans see it. They see a government sliding in the polls. They see fear of competition. They see a desperate attempt to change the playing field rather than defend their record. Who bans a political label unless they fear the people who use it? The government claims this is about preventing confusion. Well, I'm confused, Mr. Speaker. Albertans run businesses, they manage households, they raise families, they navigate complex tax codes and health systems, but suddenly they can't tell the difference between a Progressive Conservative and a United Conservative. Come on. That argument isn't just ridiculous; it's insulting.

If the UCP were confident, they'd meet us head-on. They'd debate the ideas. They'd defend their record. Instead, plummeting in the polls with a Progressive Conservative option in the mix, they know that they'd fall to a distant third. So what do they do? They change the rules. They ban the words. They rewrite the law retroactively. That's not leadership. That's fear, and fear is corrosive to democracy.

Now, let's talk about referendums. Bill 14 doesn't just tweak the process. It politicizes it. It strips power from an independent officer and hands it to a politician. It removes constitutional compliance checks. It allows questions that violate the Constitution to proceed, and it gives the Minister of Justice authority to alter those questions before they even reach voters. That's not a permissive environment for democracy; that's a controlled environment for the UCP government.

While the minister insists that this isn't about separation, separatists are celebrating. They call this bill a massive win. They say that it clears the path for an independence referendum, and they're all gearing up their campaigns. Mr. Speaker, when legislation sold as streamlining democracy becomes a gift to separatists, once again, something is deeply wrong.

Now, let's turn to the legal community. Bill 14 limits the Law Society's authority, grants the Justice minister immunity, moves appeals away from independent bodies, and hands the minister control over the Alberta Law Foundation. Once again, this isn't modernization; this is centralization, one office reaching into every corner of our justice system.

Albertans should be asking: why? Why does the UCP need this much power? The answer is simple, fear. I heard it earlier. Fear of

competition, fear of accountability, fear of losing control, and fear of being found out. Mr. Speaker, democracy does not require comfort, it does not require agreement, but it absolutely requires freedom: freedom of choice, freedom of association, and yes, freedom of words. Attempts to narrow those freedoms will only strengthen the resolve of those committed to fight for them, and Albertans in every corner of this province are watching.

To my former colleagues: I hope that you see the signs. I feel the shift in sentiment. This is not going to end the way that you think. The UCP will be out of government. You'll have to go home and you'll have to explain why you supported an overtly controlling separatist agenda.

So let's get back to normal in this Legislature. Let's restore checks and balances. Let's reject laws that silence competition and strip away oversight. Vote for democracy. Vote against Bill 14. Strong and free should never mean only if you agree with the UCP.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Ganley: "First . . . kill all the lawyers." I'm quoting William Shakespeare. What Shakespeare was actually talking about was how to get a tyrant into power, because when you remove those who guard the rule of law, you open up a path for rhetorical abuse for an autocracy, a dictatorship. There are a lot of words for this centralized control. There are a lot of different systems of rule and governance, Mr. Speaker, but ultimately one of two things is true: the law is supreme and everyone must live by the rules, or a person or a group of people are supreme. Either a set of rules for all of us, regardless of station, or a person: fallible, capricious, and corruptible.

Well, Bill 14 is absolutely a step in this direction. It aims directly at the rule of law. It allows a separatist referendum that the courts have ruled is unconstitutional, essentially allowing friends of the government to circumvent the rules that apply to all of the rest of us.

It gives the Minister of Justice an exemption from the ethical and competence requirements that bind every other lawyer. It gives the minister power over the regulator that is absolutely problematic in every way. The bill also takes over portions of the Alberta Law Foundation in section 6(22) to (24).

Now, steps along this path have been taken before, and I've said a lot about it. To the Minister of Justice, Mr. Speaker: sir, this is not your money. This is interest on lawyers' trust accounts. Because a lawyer can't benefit from holding money, they can't earn interest on what is sometimes significant amounts of money, so it goes into the Alberta Law Foundation. Historically there has been a deal. A certain percentage of it goes to help support legal aid, and the rest of it goes to different projects that are important to the administration of justice and the rule of law, from supporting domestic violence survivors to sexual assault prevention to legal information. The minister is essentially appropriating that money, taking it away from those organizations so that he can use it to pay for his own obligations.

9:10

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to criminal law, the government, the prosecuting entity, has an obligation to provide legal aid for people that come under its superior power. That's what legal aid is. That is why the government is obligated to do it, and this government, this minister is appropriating money that doesn't belong to them to pay for their own obligations. We have a word for that, but I won't say it here.

In addition, it outlaws the use of the term "conservative" by any other conservative party. They include a few other words in the hopes that folks won't notice, but it's pretty clear what it's about.

It's about a government that is embarrassed to run on their record, and well they should be.

Mr. Speaker, I would say for my purposes that the worst part of this bill is definitely what it does to the rule of law. The rule of law is a concept that – I don't know – the public doesn't talk about a lot, but it actually impacts every piece of our everyday life. Basically, it means that the law is supreme, that everyone is subject to it. It's the opposite of a tyrannical regime. At the end of the day, something reigns supreme, and either it's a person, often claiming the right of God, or it's the law. Those are the options. And I'm worried that this government is trending increasingly away from the law reigning supreme to a group of people reigning supreme and privileging their friends.

The Canadian Bar Association, who I'm quoting from here, talks about the rule of law and some of the principles that are involved.

No one is above the law: In Canada, the law applies equally to everyone – individuals, businesses, and governments alike . . . A strong legal system prevents sudden . . . changes and arbitrary decisions, creating a secure environment for families, communities and businesses.

Mr. Speaker, if the members opposite think that undercutting the rule of law is something that just advances their political purposes, they are sadly mistaken. In jurisdictions where the rule of law is undercut, it has massive economic impacts because no one wants to invest in a jurisdiction where the rules change at the whim of the leader.

Returning to quoting the Canadian Bar Association.

The rule of law holds . . . government[s] accountable: The rule of law keeps government power in check. It ensures [that] leaders serve the people, not themselves. Those in power must follow the same rules as everyone else and be held accountable for their actions . . . The misuse of legislative power . . .

I'm still quoting here.

. . . can lead to laws that infringe the rights and freedoms of individuals.

I think we're seeing that.

Legislative power should protect the rights and interests of all citizens – not just those with influence.

Those are essentially the reasons that the rule of law is important. It's important because it protects the economy. It protects people's willingness to invest. It protects the individual rights of the people who live here. It means that your rights as a person walking around here are based on laws, not on the whim of whoever the governing party is.

So what does this bill do that undercuts the rule of law? Well, to begin with, it takes away the jurisdiction of the courts. In Canada the Constitution is probably our supreme law. It's the law that binds every person, and it's very difficult to change. It requires agreement from provinces, and it requires agreement from a two-thirds majority of the citizens. There's a reason for that. It is meant to guard against what is called the tyranny of the majority. That's an instance in which the majority feels that their rights are somehow advanced by persecuting an innocent minority group. We've seen this throughout history, Mr. Speaker. We have seen this happen over and over in tyrannical regimes because unchecked power corrupts very quickly. This is a movement towards exactly that sort of unchecked power.

This allows a separatist referendum, one brought forward by friends of the UCP, to override the Constitution. It means that they have essentially said: we have a supreme law in this land, and we think that our friends getting what they want is more important than the supreme law in this land. That's a huge problem. It's a problem for everyone in this country.

Section 6(4) also allows the minister to set rules for education and training requirements of the Law Society. Essentially what is

happening here: the Law Society creates its own rules, and the benchers of the law society – that's the governing board – they aren't unelected. They are elected by members of the profession. That's what makes it a self-regulating profession. Those members, Mr. Speaker, voted overwhelmingly in favour of supporting the benchers and supporting the education – it was called the path – that was brought forward to educate all lawyers in accordance with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This is the Law Society's response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. When some members who don't feel, I guess, that they should have to know about the history of this land went against it, members of the society overwhelmingly voted to support it. But the government doesn't like it, so it doesn't matter what the majority thinks. It only matters what the government thinks, so they will override it. It's a massive overreach into the Law Society.

The Law Society is meant to hold the Attorney General accountable. Mr. Speaker, in our system in Alberta the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General are the same person, and there actually is a certain amount of conflict. The Minister of Justice sort of has jurisdiction over the court systems and is a member of cabinet that sort of sits with the political whims of the government. The Attorney General is arguably the person providing legal advice to the government, and in some systems, not here in Alberta, not in Canada, but in other parliamentary systems, the Attorney General is actually required to sit outside of cabinet because they are meant to provide legal advice on the government's legal obligations that is not influenced by politics. Boy, is that the opposite of what we have going on here.

The point of the Law Society holding the Attorney General to the same ethical standards as lawyers – and honestly, Mr. Speaker, as someone who has held the role I would argue they should be held to higher ethical standards – is that this is someone who is supposed to be telling government about their obligations to their citizens to protect their citizens' individual rights, to not infringe upon the citizen, to not act in a capricious manner that privileges the interests of friends and insiders over the interests of everyone else, to not persecute people for whatever characteristic it is the government has chosen to dislike on this particular day.

9:20

Finally, the bill exempts the Attorney General from the ethics and competence requirements that the Law Society would otherwise hold them to, and it applies to past attorneys general as well. Mr. Speaker, I would like to state for the record, since this happens to apply to me, that I don't want it. You can have it back. This provision is incredibly problematic. Not only should the Attorney General be as competent and ethical as other lawyers; arguably they should be more so. This is the opposite of what should happen. Having more power should mean you have more responsibility to go with it, not less, but this government is willing, apparently, to grant that exemption. That really makes one wonder what the problem is that they're trying to solve with this particular provision. I guess we'll never know.

At the end of the day, this bill is incredibly problematic. It takes us one step closer to a system where the popular kids pick their friends, which, I don't know, just sounds like a schoolyard. But it's more than a schoolyard because when the popular kids control the police force, when the popular kids control the health care system, the education system, they control your access to a job, they put markers on your driver's licence, it's incredibly problematic, and it escalates to abuse, Mr. Speaker, incredibly quickly. We must all be held to one set of rules, the government most of all, and seeing them exempt themselves and their friends should tell you everything you need to know about this government.

I would urge all members, Mr. Speaker, to vote against this bill and to oppose tyranny.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Member Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To pick up where my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View left off, this bill is, indeed, troubling and problematic. There's a lot going on in this bill and I'm going to focus in on just a couple of things.

I want to talk a little bit about the changes to the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act, and I'll lift directly from the fact sheet that was put out by the government on this bill. The Chief Electoral Officer would have to refuse to register a party or adjust the register to reflect a party's name if that party's name has the potential to be confused with the name of another party. So my question, Mr. Speaker, when I read this is: does the government have any respect at all for the intelligence of Albertans and their ability to distinguish between one party and another? Recently with Bill 11 we've heard this government suddenly becoming a fan of social democracies in Europe. Why can't they see that in those social democracies there are elections with multiple parties using similar words, and yet somehow people are able to distinguish between those parties and what those parties have on offer?

So I'll just take a second and let's look at the example of Germany. They have the Christian Democratic Union of Germany and the Christian Social Union of Bavaria. To make matters worse, both of these are conservative parties. That must leave the electorate in Germany very confused. It must be easier for them to tell the difference between the Christian Social Union of Bavaria and the Social Democratic Party of Germany, with only one being conservative and the other being socialist. Three of the parties have "Germany" in their name, so this must leave the voters wondering if the other parties are for Germany or not. It's all very confusing. Mr. Speaker, this change is absolutely ridiculous. Let the name "Conservative" be used. Let the name "Progressive Conservative" come back, then run on your record in the next election and let the people decide.

This is right up there with the speed limit on the QE II and the new license plates. These are not priorities for Albertans. Albertans want the government to fix education. They want the government to fix health care, which I think they're now about 1,145 days overdue on their promise to do so, but this government needs distractions since they are failing completely on addressing the needs of Albertans.

Now I also want to take a moment to talk about the amendments to the Conflicts of Interest Act. I'm trying to just do a quick comparison across the country, but I feel confident that this UCP government has made more changes to the Conflicts of Interest Act than probably anywhere in Canada and maybe anywhere in history. In just two years they have made multiple changes to the Conflicts of Interest Act, and all of those changes are to suit the needs of the UCP and their friends.

Want to accept gifts to skybox tickets to playoff hockey games? No problem. We have a conflict of interest amendment for that. Want to accept more valuable gifts and not bother disclosing those gifts? The UCP can amend that too. Do you find the opinion of the Ethics Commissioner a barrier when you're wanting to introduce legislation that is in line with your family business? No problem. We'll just amend the Conflicts of Interest Act. The UCP can even take care of those pesky problems where members in leadership positions interfere with the justice system. The public only has one question with respect to the conflict of interest amendments here: what are you trying to hide? What does the UCP not want the public to know that you require these changes? Mr. Speaker, only a year

ago there was a committee struck to review the Conflicts of Interest Act. These items weren't brought forward then. Why now?

With respect to some of the comments, I'm going to defer to some comments that my colleagues made, my colleagues who are lawyers, about the constitutional amendments in the Citizen Initiative Act and associated regulations, but I do want to try and talk this through for a second. The UCP is removing the previous requirement that a proposal cannot contravene the Constitution, but to be clear, the UCP is totally okay if it does contravene the Constitution, because the Chief Electoral Officer can no longer refer those questions to the court. Only the Minister of Justice can refer items to the court and then, of course, ignore their decision, but then the Minister of Justice will decide if the question needs to be changed before it's actually put to a referendum, so a citizens' initiative could proceed with all the effort into gathering over 300,000 signatures from Albertans, but then after all of that work the Minister of Justice gets to decide if it is in line with the Constitution, if it's clear and appropriate, and if the question should be changed.

Mr. Speaker, if the UCP government thinks that Albertans can't handle the difference between two parties with the word "conservative" in it, I wonder how they could possibly see Albertans seeing the difference between: they signed a petition for a certain question, and then the minister just changed the question, and are they really voting on the same thing? The UCP has made so many errors and blunders here in trying to placate their separatist core of their party. There are no amendments that can fix what they have created.

I think it's clear here, Mr. Speaker, that anybody that values democracy in this House should be voting no on Bill 14.

Thank you.

9:30

The Acting Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So much to unpack from what I just heard, but for another time. I will move to adjourn debate on this bill.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 13 Regulated Professions Neutrality Act

The Chair: Are there members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia.

Member Batten: Thank you so much, Madam Chair. I rise to join debate this evening in opposition to Bill 13, the Regulated Professions Neutrality Act, a.k.a the Jordan Peterson act. There seems to be some confusion about what a professional is. Though the minister spoke some words of praise at one point, this bill honestly insults every single professional, including me. Let's just talk a little bit about what a professional actually is and what that means.

We live in a time when the boundaries between our personal and our professional lives are super thin. Social media follows us home, public expectations follow us into the grocery store, and then the

way that we conduct ourselves on or off the clock shapes the trust in our workplaces, our institutions, our government, democracy. This debate isn't about restricting personal freedom. It is about accountability, standards, and public trust. Professionalism isn't about protecting the professional; it's about protecting the people they serve. Professionals like teachers and nurses and engineers and physicians and elected officials carry a social contract. We are trusted to demonstrate competence, uphold ethical standards, and conduct ourselves in ways that strengthen the public's confidence in us.

Let's just take an example from one of my personal favourite professions and one that Albertans deeply trust: nurses. We have two nursing graduates from the same program. They pass the same licensing exam, and they begin their first shift on the same unit. On paper they look identical. Professionalism isn't printed on your degree or on a certificate. It shows up based on how you behave. Nurse Alex arrives prepared, communicates clearly, follows safety protocols, and treats every patient with dignity and owns mistakes when they happen. Alex is human, and mistakes, well, they happen. No one is perfect. But they are consistent, they are accountable, and they are grounded in the values of their profession.

On the other hand, we have Nurse Jordan, who has the same education but behaves completely differently. They rush in late, they speak abruptly, they postpone documentation or charting. They get defensive when coached, and they blame others when things go wrong. Their credentials match Alex's, but their conduct undermines confidence in the care they provide. This clearly shows that a degree may open up a door, but professionalism is how you then comport yourself once you've walked through. Bill 13, adding value to that at all: no.

Let's consider an elected official, an MLA, spending their day in the Legislature, ideally advocating, using evidence-based policy, meeting with their stakeholders, and reassuring constituents that they're advocating for them and that they are here representing them. In the Chamber they emphasize responsibility and accuracy, but later that evening, off-duty, the MLA shares a misleading article on social media. Maybe they were frustrated. Maybe they assumed it didn't matter because they were off the clock. But it does matter, Madam Chair, because overnight that post spreads. Constituents are confused. Some believe this information; others are upset that their representatives circulated it at all. Advocacy groups demand clarification. Media reaches out. A career of credibility suddenly becomes overshadowed by one careless moment because when an MLA spreads misinformation, intentionally or not, it undermines the confidence in their judgment, the trust in the institution, the credibility of their work, and the reliability of the information they provide. The public doesn't see two versions of us: work MLA versus after-hours MLA. They see one person, one voice. Like it or not, it is part of what being a professional is. It's part of the responsibility of being a professional.

Let's take another example: physicians, a family doctor. Someone again that Albertans trust with their health and often with their most vulnerable moments. In the clinic they follow evidence and they uphold the highest standards, but off-duty the same physician shares a debunked medical claim online. It's not malicious. Inattentive, potentially. Unprofessional, as I'm trying to demonstrate here, and maybe it was out of frustration or fear. Regardless, this post went up without the physician verifying its accuracy. Now, again, the public does not separate the doctor inside the clinic and the doctor as a private citizen. They see a single voice, a single authority. Again, overnight the patients see it and they panic. Some cancel their treatments; others accuse the system of deception. Public health officials have to respond, and that single post creates a world of fear and confusion because the truth is

simple. Public trust is not something professionals turn on and then off at the end of their shift.

We've heard arguments in this space. Things like, "Oh, professionals deserve complete privacy. What they do off the clock shouldn't matter." Madam Chair, everyone deserves to have a private life, but privacy is not immunity to responsibility. [interjection] Right? Thank you. When conduct enters the public sphere, it becomes part of the public's experience of that profession.

Another one: expecting that standards outside of work is just not fair. Well, Madam Chair, standards are not punishments. These are commitments to the people we serve, and with that authority comes an expectation of integrity, not because we want to police personal time. It's about protecting the public, those that the professionals actually serve.

As I've said, professionals do not function in two separate identities. The public sees one person and, because trust is fragile, consistency matters on duty, off-duty, online, off-line. Professionalism isn't perfect, but it is accountability, it is consistency, and it is service. Standards, they are not limits on personal freedom. They are promises made to the public. They strengthen credibility, they reinforce confidence, and they protect the bond between those who serve and those we're serving. Once that bond is broken it is far harder to repair than had you maybe taken care of it and been professional the whole dam time.

Madam Chair, I want to highlight something that happened in this very Chamber earlier today because I think it perfectly illustrates one of the many concerns I'm raising today about the priorities and the professionalism that we've seen in this Assembly and that we're seeing with Bill 13. This government shut down private members' debate not because of time pressures, not because of procedure necessities. No. They simply did not want to debate a motion. Yeah. They chose avoidance over accountability.

9:40

Now, Madam Chair, adults do not pick up their toys and stomp out of the room when they don't want to participate, and professionals, true professionals, do not abandon their responsibilities because the conversation is, oh, just too uncomfortable. That's not professionalism. What we witnessed today was not leadership, it wasn't respect for this Chamber, and it certainly wasn't respect for the Albertans who voted each of us into this space.

If anything, today made it abundantly clear why this government felt the need to table legislation about professionalism, because it appears that they struggle with it. They struggle to demonstrate the respect, the discipline, and the responsibility of their offices. Professionally speaking, shutting down debate is the legislative equivalent to turning your back on the people you're meant to serve. It undermines public trust, and it signals that dissent is inconvenient rather than necessary or part of a healthy debate. It reinforces the point I'm trying to make today. Well, one of the points. Bill 13 is not what Albertans have asked for. It's not what Albertans want. It's not what the professional bodies want. One can only assume that this is what this government wants. I'm certainly not hearing it from my constituents, any of them. The government focusing on the wrong things means that they are failing to uphold basic professional standards that public service demands.

Madam Chair, while this government spends time chasing distractions and legislating solutions to problems of their own creation, Albertans are facing crises that demand urgent, competent leadership. These are the day-to-day realities affecting Albertans across the province. Affordability has reached a breaking point. Albertans are doing everything right. They are working full-time, one job, two jobs, three. They're budgeting carefully, they're

cutting back where they can, and they're still falling behind. Groceries cost more. Utilities cost more. Insurance continues to cost more. Rent and mortgages have surged to levels where people are being pushed out of their homes.

What they actually need is not Bill 13. What they need is a government willing to actually practice responsibly. We have workers in Alberta who are proud of what they contribute to this province. They want the dignity of work that fair pay brings. They want stability, and they want to be able to support their families. A government that likes to boast about how the economy is booming: well, if people can't afford to live, who cares about the boom? Madam Chair, the wrong priorities.

Emergency rooms are closing. Ambulances are waiting to off-load patients. People are waiting months, sometimes years for surgeries, diagnostic, and mental health care. Families are searching desperately for family doctors. Health care workers are exhausted, and they are burning out. Instead of addressing these systemic crises, this government continues to interfere, disrupt, and destabilize the entire system. Alberta doesn't need more ideological restructuring. It needs a government that respects the expertise of the actual professionals. It needs a government that actually understands what that means and that acts accordingly. Instead, we're being offered things like, oh, I don't know, for-profit, two-tiered health care. Cool. You can have all the health care you need, as long as you have a credit card with a high limit. Not what Albertans are asking for.

Alberta's classrooms are busting at the seams. Our teachers are struggling to support their students, whether they have complex needs or not. Parents are fundraising for basic supplies in classrooms.

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to understand the relevancy of the debate at this point. We're not having a debate, to be very clear for everyone in this House tonight, about what isn't in the legislation. We're going to discuss what is in the legislation. You were doing a very good job with that earlier in your remarks, and I am certain you were just getting to your point.

Please continue.

Member Batten: Thank you, Madam Chair. Bill 13 tries to – well, it doesn't try. I guess it actively – again, the government cannot stay in their lane. They do not have the space. They do not have the expertise. They do not have, well, until they force this through, the ability to influence professional bodies the way that, apparently, they'd like to. Again, that's not what Albertans have asked for.

Now, professionalism, which is what this bill is about, or at least what part of this bill is about, is about prioritizing what matters most. It is about actually serving the people that you've been elected to serve. How does this bill serve the people that are serving others or serve Albertans at all? It doesn't.

What it does is it opens up opportunity for hate speech, and there was an opportunity inside this space – I've lost track of days; I want to say it was last week – where an amendment was put forward so that we could eliminate that loophole, and this government voted completely against it. I mean, the message there is kind of – well, Albertans are smart. If you vote against legislation that is trying to stop hate speech, well, Albertans can read between the lines. They're paying attention. There was an opportunity to make this bill less terrible, but we chose not to – I say we; I mean the government – even though that would have satisfied just a little bit of what Albertans are actually asking for, which is that accountability, that professionalism, that respect. Instead, Bill 13.

Now, I recognize that speaking to what is not inside this bill seems to be a soft spot, but it's really difficult at this point to debate

bills that are simply here to satisfy the people on that side of the room. Like, it's really difficult at this point because my job is to advocate for what my constituents are asking for. Again, it's not this bill. It is not interfering with the professionals. It is not ignoring everything else that Albertans have been very clear about what they need. It is winter, Madam Chair. It's cold. People don't have warm places to go, and we're talking about the government butting into professionals. How is that possibly the correct priority to have? It's not.

True professionals do not leave a burning building to argue about who owns the hose. They do not ignore emergencies in favour of an ideological debate. They show up and they identify the real problem and they get to work solving it, not writing bills that only serve themselves or their buddies who would like to be able to say whatever they want. No one gets to say whatever they want because we live in a society. We have agreements.

9:50

Canada is not based on what we are seeing from this government. It is not about misunderstanding what your job is, which is very clear what we're seeing here from the government, and then messing with the rules when people call you on it. What their actual job would be is – oh, I don't know – take care of some of the other things I've already mentioned. Bill 13 doesn't talk about health care. Bill 13 doesn't talk about affordability, cost of living, groceries.

I would love if anyone would tell me: have you received any correspondence from your constituents saying, "Gee, I think we should interfere with the professionals"? Anybody? Funny, that. Not one. And we're perfectly aware of the hundreds if not thousands of e-mails at this point, honestly, Madam Chair, that have come into all of our offices sharing very clearly what the priorities of Albertans are, and again, this is not it.

The Chair: Hon. member, I thought I was clear in my first cautioned remarks to you about talking about what the bill is not rather than talking about what the bill is. I would urge you once again to talk about the bill as opposed to what the bill is not. You have 41 seconds remaining.

Member Batten: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, just casually opening it up here, section 7(1), restrictions on mandatory education or training: wow, that certainly fits in well with what I was saying earlier about how the priorities are not what they should be, that removing things like DEI training, for instance, is not an appropriate move for a professional body to do or for a professional to think was okay.

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate on Bill 13 in Committee of the Whole? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise and offer some thoughts on the Regulated Professions Neutrality Act, Bill 13, which is being considered in Committee of the Whole right now. Before I start my comments, I just want to thank my friend from Calgary-Acadia for her thoughtful contributions to the debate. I wanted to build on some of the things that she mentioned during her speech, and that's really around, I think, the preamble here to this bill, which says that "whereas freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression is of foundational importance to Albertan society" and "whereas Albertans should not be discouraged from holding a wide array of views on political, historical, social or cultural issues and freely expressing their opinions and beliefs."

You know, it's these things in the preamble that were echoed when the minister stood up to introduce this piece of legislation in second reading. He said that Albertans value free expression. We value the ability to speak openly, to debate ideas, and to hold personal beliefs without fear that someone will police our personal opinions.

Well, Madam Chair, as the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar I certainly have a long history of what this government actually believes when it comes to dealing with freedom of expression when the expression goes contrary to the things that they want to hear. I could rehash what just happened to me in question period earlier this afternoon because of some comments that I had made. I expressed my opinion on the job that the minister of education had done in handling his file, and rather than allowing me to engage in the free debate and the free expression of opinions, as this bill seeks to support, the government members stood up and refused to answer any questions that I would pose, no matter what the topic.

This government just in this session has shown exactly what they think about freedom of expression when it comes to expression that they don't like. We've seen them four times use the notwithstanding clause to make sure that teachers don't have the freedom of expression when it comes to their dissatisfaction with the government's contracts and their negotiations on a new labour deal. We've seen the government use the notwithstanding clause to prohibit the freedom of gender expression in three separate pieces of legislation that make up Bill 9. When somebody wants to freely express the gender that they identify with, they're not allowed to. Any time members of this Chamber seek to broach topics that make the government uncomfortable, go contrary to the things that the government believes or wants to talk about, the government uses every tool in its book to shut down discussion.

My friend from Calgary-Acadia mentioned earlier today the government's willingness to debate a written question about AHS severance that the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane put on the Order Paper. Seems like a fair question. The government doesn't even have to get up and speak. They don't have to provide the answers. But they were so afraid of what other people might say during that debate, they shut it down. That's what we've seen repeatedly from this government this session. Even before session started, on the Public Accounts Committee . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, we're almost five minutes into your remarks here, in which I hesitate to understand any of them having to do with Bill 13 but everything . . .

Mr. Schmidt: Well . . .

The Chair: Don't argue with me. I'm speaking. Every remark having nothing to do with Bill 13 but any other piece of legislation or comment or thought in your head. I can appreciate that we're in Committee of the Whole, but we are on Bill 13. We have some time here, and I can appreciate that you will continue with your remarks in regard to Bill 13.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Chair: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Point of Clarification

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise on this point of order, just under 13(2), on the ruling. You have intervened on my members during this Committee of the Whole debate, and I would like to reference from *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* chapter 13, specifically this passage:

The rules of relevance and repetition are intertwined and mutually reinforcing. The requirement that speeches remain relevant to the question before the House flows from the latter's right to reach decisions without undue obstruction and to exclude from debate any discussion not conducive to that end.

But the rules against repetition are

difficult to define and enforce not least because such enforcement must respect the freedom of speech enjoyed by all Members.

Very specifically, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* speaks about the difficulty of invoking a rule against repetition when a member has only just begun their remarks.

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

Now, Madam Chair, I rise very respectfully under 13(2). Aware of this place and the need to accomplish what we're here to set out to do, I believe that the freedom of speech requires that we allow our members, especially under Committee of the Whole, the opportunity to connect the thoughts that they are making and to have a bit of latitude. So, respectfully, I request that for the speeches that are going on here in Committee of the Whole, especially given how much business we hope to get through between now and the scheduled end of session this coming Thursday.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member. Thank you for your remarks. I can appreciate what you're saying. I'm not ruling on matters of repetition but matters of relevance. Given that we're, as stated, almost five minutes into the member's remarks and we have yet to actually reference the legislation . . . [interjection] I am speaking, hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. Thank you.

Explaining my ruling, which perhaps I'll repeat again because we have so much time here. Given that we are almost five minutes into the member's debate, I'm not talking about repetition; I'm talking about relevancy. We're talking about any other piece of legislation except the legislation at hand. Caution was being given to the member in terms of getting back on track. That's simply where we're at.

This is turning into a bigger deal than it was ever meant to be. I was simply providing caution, which I will continue to do. I hope the Assembly is satisfied with my remarks. I hope that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar will continue with his time remaining talking about Bill 13 in Committee of the Whole, for the 15 and a half minutes that he has left.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

10:00

Debate continued

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Chair, for allowing me to continue to speak to this bill. Let me repeat what I said at the very beginning of debate when I started this comment. I quoted the preamble, which states . . .

The Chair: Sorry, hon. member. We are not debating. We are not debating.

Mr. Schmidt: I'm not debating.

The Chair: We are not debating. We are not debating. You have the time in this Assembly to debate the legislation that is at hand. You now have the opportunity to continue with your debate on Bill 13. That's it. You don't have to explain to me further anything that's happened to date. I have simply provided caution. I want to hear

debate on Bill 13. I am certain you have wonderful remarks in regard to this debate, and that's what I'm hoping we are getting at.

We are not continuing debate. You are, with this Assembly.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: You may continue.

Mr. Schmidt: I was simply restating what I said at the very beginning of my comments on this bill, which was that the preamble states, "Whereas freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression is of foundational importance to Albertan society." For all members of the Chamber, that is the very first paragraph of this bill, setting out that freedom of thought, belief, opinion, and expression is of foundational importance to Albertan society, so important, in fact, that the Legislature in its operations should also uphold the freedom of thought, belief, opinion, and expression being of foundational importance to Albertan society.

As I've made my remarks, I have questioned the government's sincerity in its commitment to upholding the freedom of thought, belief, opinion, and expression in Alberta by providing examples of how this government has acted to shut down the freedom of thought, belief, opinion, and expression right here in this Legislature. It is well documented.

My friends here on this side of the House who have participated in the Public Accounts Committee were there, too. The Public Accounts Committee exists to look at how well government is delivering on its mandate, whether or not it's providing value for service, and we should be able to freely pursue accountability in government departments where they've shown or we suspect they are not upholding their commitments, not providing value for money. When we have clear evidence that this is the case, particularly with the Auditor General's report around the DynaLife contract, even though we gave the government members on the Public Accounts Committee two opportunities to vote to have a meeting to examine those reports, the government voted to not hold the meeting. Not only that, Madam Chair, they won't even hold future meetings focused on Auditor General reports.

The Chair: Hon. member, we are now fully talking about a PAC committee, not the Regulated Professions Neutrality Act. I had great respect for the stretch of your argument for quite some time, gave you quite a bit of leeway, but here we are again, not talking about the bill.

I'll give you another opportunity to talk. [interjection] No. To talk about the bill. Not to argue with me again, but to talk about the bill. Go ahead. Try again.

Mr. Schmidt: Yeah. Okay. Members of the Assembly, here is apparently what I'm allowed to say about this bill. [Mr. Schmidt stood in silence]

I conclude my remarks, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there others that wish to join the debate on Bill 13 in Committee of the Whole on the Regulated Professions Neutrality Act? I see the hon. member for Calgary-Klein.

Member Tejada: Thank you, Madam Chair. Never a dull day in this House, and especially fitting that we are talking about Bill 13, the Regulated Professions Neutrality Act, or as the UCP government has lovingly named it, the Jordan Peterson Bill.

10:10

After what we just witnessed, I am going to read the preamble.

Whereas the freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression is of foundational importance to Albertan society;

Whereas Albertans should not be discouraged from holding a wide array of views on political, historical, social or cultural issues, and freely expressing their opinions and beliefs;

Critical parts, I guess, of what the government was aiming for in this bill.

What I will say is that there is absolutely not a neutral thing about this bill, and there's nothing neutral about the extreme using of the bill's namesake, just like the defence of other bills that are supposedly around upholding neutrality, like the one that members of this government have gone to defend in Quebec around religious symbols. Bill 13, like the bill in Quebec with the example where it outlawed religious symbols that would largely target and disenfranchise marginalized people, enshrines into law a refusal to be informed about the people who are served by any regulated profession and creates the favourite dichotomy and tool of division that I have seen from this government over and over again, which is us and them.

While I am deeply disappointed in Bill 13, as many Albertans are with this bill as well as the slate of bills that have come from this government over this sitting, it is completely unsurprising for the party that decries so-called identity politics to engage in just that and roll it into this bill. We see that there's a failure here to see that when we prop up extremist views and defend it as free speech, that's part of the problem. That's part of what divides us in this province.

What concerns me about this government and its slate of bills is that although the packaging and titles of each of these bills may differ slightly and offer a different take on why the rights of minorities and the way that they're served, why marginalized folks and the vulnerable don't matter, the overall message is the same. I think I would sum up that overall message as similar to some that I've seen on trucks as I've been out and about in my life as an Albertan, which is all my life. The fit in or F off concept or, in more delicate terms, conform to be acceptable. In this case it's a bill that follows through on much of that messaging over the years. If you're not part of what this government considers the default and neutral identity, it's okay to other you. In their rally cry against political correctness, they're more than happy to serve marginalized people up on the altar of Jordan Peterson, in this case.

I've already heard a variety of comments from the members opposite around issues like immigration and what kinds of immigrants might integrate seamlessly, what kinds of kids should or shouldn't take up space in our classrooms, how gender identity and expression – another expression that is not free anymore in this province – should be othered, denied, and maybe even reported. In years past the UCP has presented bills that refused to include Indigenous folks in recognition of genocide, curriculum drafts that suggested that the discussion of racist policies that guided the creation of residential schools, and the schools themselves, should only be limited to certain grades. Freedom of expression, indeed.

In speaking against this bill, I'm actually not participating in identity politics or wokeness. I'm not arguing for the end of free speech. As much as I know that this government loves their imported Americanisms, we do have freedom of expression here. We also have laws against hate speech, and those are well defined. But we live in a complex world where the in-real-life and online often overlap. We know, even in our roles as Legislative Assembly members, that we don't suddenly shroud ourselves by personal time when we make comments in public. We know that our actions impact our reputation, and they do for all professions.

I'm arguing that all of our identities matter and that there's room for all of us and that our regulated professions need to determine how they serve the people they serve, who they advocate for, and determine competency for the members of their own professions,

and they need to determine what the nuances are of the society that they work in and the people that they'll be working with. After hearing some of the comments on citizenship markers earlier, the trampling of human rights, the right to bargain, and who should or shouldn't receive health care, I'd say we could do a fair bit to build those competencies, any of us who serve as members in this Chamber.

So in one bill of many the UCP, who will loudly decry jurisdictional turf wars, will now overstep their authority and reach their long arms into regulatory bodies and tell them what they can and can't discipline members for. The bill purports to protect free speech outside of work hours. As I mentioned, we're not shrouded by personal time in the work that we do here. They will defend this as protecting freedom of speech, but what it does is that it allows professionals to make irresponsible claims and comments and free them from all accountability.

I know one thing. I know that the public will look at those professionals and not feel safe. I think any member here would agree with me that if you're being served by a regulated professional of any sort, you should be able to be safe and who you are as you are being served. Although the regulatory bodies know well who they serve and determine that deeper contextual training is necessary to do their jobs, to build fairness in their practice, the UCP is now proposing to block them from requiring that competency from their members.

Now, one of the areas where this really concerns me is in justice, where Indigenous people are overrepresented in the justice system. Lawyers may now not be mandated to take the Law Society's path course. And I'll remind the members opposite that, while they love to let us know about their respect for treaty and in some cases I have watched them wax sentimental in tears about reconciliation and missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, this bill flies in the face of any of those nice sounds you make.

When you say you're committed to truth and reconciliation but now deny regulatory bodies a way to fulfill the 94 calls to action, when cultural competency can play a role in effectively representing clients in a courtroom and it can no longer be a requirement, when unconscious bias training, instead of being an important component of the practice, is now dismissed as caving to wokeness and instead of having that awareness that our institutions are biased and that we all have bias baked in – that's not a personal judgment on an individual; it's something that we all need to be aware of to better do our jobs. I know this government is fond of box-checking and listing their accomplishments when it comes to antiracism, multiculturalism, and Indigenous inclusion. They may have to go back and revise all those government websites if they intend to pass this bill.

10:20

It just brings me back to the words of another colleague: who is this for? Is there an epidemic of professionals that are being disciplined for bad behaviour? Who asked for this? It's unfortunate that we have a government that has the power to do right by Albertans and to allow regulatory bodies to determine how they best serve those same Albertans; they have the power to do meaningful work on affordability, wages, job creation, health care, and education, and instead it is this government that is hyperfocused on identity politics. If you don't fall within what is neutral and what is the default identity, you don't fit in and you won't be served properly. For that reason, I oppose Bill 13 and encourage all of the members in this House to do the same.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 13, the Regulated Professions Neutrality Act. You know, I attend a lot of events with African, Caribbean, and Black communities in this province, and you know what? At many of them I've heard the Premier, UCP ministers, their representatives for outreach. When they're talking to Black audiences, they talk about how they acknowledge systemic racism exists. Even heard them commit to take action on it. Indeed, the Premier even has an Alberta Black Advisory Council to, quote, advise the Premier on combatting anti-Black racism, removing systemic barriers, and improving Black Albertans' well-being, et cetera, but Bill 13 shows just how little their words mean, just how absolutely, profoundly performative those actions are.

February 2024 KPMG Canada put out a survey on how Canadian employers are making progress on anti-Black racism. They reported that 81 per cent of African, Caribbean, and Black workers experienced some kind of racism or microaggression in the workplace over the last year; 13 per cent reported that they had experienced more in the last year.

Now, interestingly, they also report that 83 per cent of Black Canadians say that their employer has made progress on their promises to be more equitable and inclusive for Black employees, 82 per cent that their company has made significant progress in a more equitable and inclusive workplace in the four years since African American George Floyd Jr.'s murder and the global Black Lives Matter protests. Eighty-three per cent said that they've seen visible progress regarding building a pipeline of Black talent with the goal of promoting them into the C-suite, and compared to four years ago, over three-quarters, 76 per cent, said that their company now has a Black person in the C-suite or on the board of directors. Seventy-five per cent say that their co-workers' understanding has improved over the last year; same number, their manager or supervisor; same number, top management.

Madam Chair, it didn't happen by accident or on its own. It was the result of intentional effort to engage workers at these businesses, management in conversations and education about diversity, equity, and inclusion. Indeed, that's what KPMG's chief inclusion, diversity, and equity officer, Rob Davis, said. He said, "Among the first steps towards change in the workplace are awareness and understanding of racial privilege across social, political, economic, and cultural environments."

To summarize, an overwhelming majority of African, Caribbean, and Black Canadian workers surveyed said that DEI initiatives have made their lives better, but thanks to a handful of supporters of the UCP Bill 13 is taking that away. Bill 13 is saying that these programs, those initiatives that have benefited all of these Black workers, should not exist. The UCP thinks none of this should have happened. The work done by the Black Faculty Collective at the U of A to work with leadership at the U of A to significantly increase the number of Black professors working on that staff and working in leadership positions: the UCP says that shouldn't have happened. Their Black youth mentorship and leadership programs should not exist.

It's an insult, Madam Chair, and it undermines everything I have heard this government say when they stand in front of African, Caribbean, and Black professionals in this province. I can tell you that I've stood in some of the most conservative rooms in this province, and when Black professionals have stood up to speak, they have talked about the reality of systemic racism and the need to combat it, to take action, not just to spread nice words; to support DEI initiatives. But this government through Bill 13 is saying: no; professional regulatory bodies will not be allowed to institute programs and supports for Black professionals.

I want to take a moment, Madam Chair, and I want to speak directly to Black professionals in Alberta about Bill 13. To those men and women and others across our province: with Bill 13 this government is abandoning you, sacrificing your interests to a small minority. Bill 13 means that if you encounter discrimination in your workplace, racism, you'll be on your own. Your professional association will not be allowed to support you. The kinds of programs that, as noted by a top leader with KPMG, have improved the workplace for African, Caribbean, and Black people...

Mr. Yao: Point of order.

Mr. Shepherd: ... that have reduced discrimination and improved opportunity for people...

The Chair: Sorry. A point of order has been raised.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Yao: Madam Chair, the member across the way for Edmonton-City Centre under (h), (i), and (j) is making allegations. The member is imputing false, unavowed motives to this government, and quite honestly he's using abusive and insulting language to his audience to insinuate that we're basically racist. It's absolutely outrageous and disgusting. He needs to withdraw, and he needs to apologize for these comments.

The Chair: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Chair, I was waiting for the member to sit.

Madam Chair, this is not a point of order. What this is is a debate on a really serious, really tough issue in which one of my members is bringing forward the lived experience of impacted community members who will be impacted by Bill 13. The member uses 23(i). No false or unavowed motives were imputed to another member. I've listened carefully to every word that was said. The member was talking only about government action, not about any individuals.

"Uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder": I disagree with that as well. I think being able to describe accurately what is happening with a piece of legislation and the impact it will have on constituents and on Albertans across this province is an important part of the debate. While it is sensitive, it is also important, and I believe it was completely parliamentary and an important matter of debate, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. members, for your remarks. I do agree. This is a sensitive debate, certainly particularly a sensitive topic which the member was speaking to. I think it's important that there is no insinuation that anyone, even the government, particularly the government in this case, is seeking out or targeting a specific group of individuals. It's not helpful to this debate. It's not a point of order, but I will provide some caution given the remarks that I just made to the member speaking and ask him to continue.

Debate Continued

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. To be absolutely clear, I am not insinuating that this government is targeting African, Caribbean, and Black communities, but I am absolutely stating that they are significantly letting them down. They are not living up to their promises that they have made to those communities.

As I was saying, to those communities: this government is more interested in defending the rights of their supporters to say offensive

things than defending your rights and your dignity, your opportunity. With Bill 13 they're effectively saying that the challenges, the discrimination, the barriers that you face don't exist or at least are not worthy of attention.

The Chair: Sorry. I hesitate to interrupt. Can you just direct your comments through the chair?

Mr. Shepherd: Absolutely.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Shepherd: Through you, Madam Chair, to African, Caribbean, and Black Albertans.

10:30

When they stand, through you Madam Chair, in front of these communities and say the words, they mouth the platitudes, they say what they think those communities want to hear, but their actions speak louder than their words, and their actions, their decisions as laid out here in Bill 13, are to make their lives harder for the sake of their own political gain. They don't stand with you, with those communities, Madam Chair through you. Not when it counts. They are choosing to make things harder for these communities, for these individuals, for their children, their friends, their communities at large, to make it easier to speak hate and harder to combat the effects of it.

The Chair: Hon. Member, that's certainly going to cause disorder in this House to say that something is hateful. We are very close to the line, I suppose, is why I'm stepping in. I don't want to get to the line, but we're very close, so I intervene at this point. I know you know, and you're a very skilled debater, and I have faith in your arguments moving forward.

Please proceed.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will simply note that Bill 13 is about the government's insistence that professionals must be allowed to say things that others may find offensive, but these government members do not want me as a professional in this place, as a representative of many communities, to say things they find offensive despite the fact that they are true. That strikes me as the ultimate hypocrisy.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members to join the debate? The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Nenshi: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will be uncharacteristically brief, but I wanted to underline the words that the Member for Edmonton-City Centre said at the end of his discourse. It's remarkable to me that we have heard from the UCP side on this bill as recently as today in question period that this bill is about the right to offend, yet the government benches have stood up repeatedly, have interrupted repeatedly, and have tried to shut up a Black member of this House speaking about his own lived experience.

Mr. Amery: Point of order.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Amery: Madam Chair, you cautioned the Member for Edmonton-City Centre three times for making false insinuations

about this government and this government caucus. I would ask that you caution the Leader of the Opposition in the same manner. It is shameful for him to insinuate any of these types of comments or impute those on any member of this government, and I would implore you to stop that line of comment from continuing.

The Chair: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Madam Chair, simply this is not a point of order. This is obviously a matter of debate, again, a sensitive one but an important one, and I believe that the Leader of the Official Opposition should be able to continue.

The Chair: I propose a reset right now in Committee of the Whole. I can appreciate that we might be getting close to wrapping this up. There are some final remarks that need to be made. We need to be careful we're not insinuating the motives of others in this House, and I will provide those cautions at this time and allow the Leader of the Official Opposition to continue.

Debate Continued

Mr. Nenshi: Thanks, Madam Chair. I'll wrap up very quickly.

My point is simply this: if we truly believe that the purpose of this legislation is that people have the right to offend, then we have to act that way as well on the government side. If we truly believe in freedom of expression, that means members of this House need to have freedom of expression. It means people can say things that may offend the government. But what is clear to me is that that's not what this bill is about. It's not about the right for anyone to speak. It's about the right for supporters of the government's side to speak. That to me is the fundamental problem with this legislation. It strips away rights rather than gives them back, and I urge this Chamber to oppose.

[The clauses of Bill 13 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? That is carried.

The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Madam Chair, I move that the committee rise and report on Bill 13.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. van Dijken: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 13.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. So carried.

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 11

Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2)

[Adjourned debate December 1: Member Miyashiro]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to request the unanimous consent of the Assembly to move to one-minute bells for the remainder of the evening sitting.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there members wishing to speak to Bill 11 in second reading? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Member Eremenko: Well, okay. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to stand and speak to Bill 11, I think a bill that is of absolute, tantamount importance for Albertans and, unfortunately, as a result of time allocation we're bound to just an hour to talk about a bill that is fundamental to our very Canadian-ness. It has to do with universal public health care. It has to do with that one thing that makes us deeply unique from the United States, from other places around the world. It's one that I remain deeply, deeply proud and very protective of. I reckon that that's going to be the tenor of the conversation this evening about the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2).

[Mr. Rowsell in the chair]

It is a bill, Mr. Speaker, that addresses food safety, health care cards, electronic health records, and more. Certainly, these are important matters of debate, but I will focus my comments on the amendments to the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act because that is where some of the most troubling and problematic and, frankly, egregious changes are coming as a result of the UCP's decision to prioritize ideology over principle. I'm focusing on it because that's what I hear from my constituents: hundreds – hundreds – of pieces of correspondence have come into my office, and I reckon it's the same for every single office in every single corner of this province that have also heard from constituents about the deep desire to preserve public universal health care in our province.

10:40

I'd like to start by telling you about a challenging call that I had on Friday, Mr. Speaker. Katie* is an adoring mom of two young kids living in Calgary-Currie, and last fall, just over a year ago, she was nursing her youngest when she had a sudden and major seizure. It was incredibly scary and very traumatic for her young family, and not much later Katie received a diagnosis of a brain tumor. You can imagine the uncertainty into which this family was thrown. Gosh, I can't imagine. I simply have no words.

After the UCP government introduced Bill 11, Katie reached out to my office looking for some answers. She asked: would her next surgery be impacted? Would the radiologists and oncologists be subject to the legislation? What would it mean for her chemotherapy, her prognosis, and what happens if there's another emergency like there was that scary day in October? She wrote to me and the Premier saying:

I'm writing to express my deeply held opposition to two-tier health care. Please reject any moves toward dual-practice and support public investment that strengthens access, staffing, and primary care as a part of Alberta's single, universal health care system. Here's why I oppose this plan.

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

She went on,

I receive life saving cancer treatment. I am strongly opposed to this two-tier system because, at the age of 36, I have a brain tumor. I need the public doctors to stay in the public system so that my cancer care does not become impacted.

I had a call with Katie, and I said, "I'll do a bit of research," which I did promptly, and I pulled up the news conference for Bill 11 where the minister said that cancer care would not be impacted. I was deeply relieved on behalf of a fellow mother that I could come back to Katie and say: here's what the minister said in a news conference. It was all I had, because there's nothing in the legislation that actually says which sectors of our health care system they can guarantee will not be impacted.

But Katie doesn't need political spin. She needs reassurance. She needs a promise from this government that they will not implement changes that will impact her course of care. She needs certainty, not spin. I'm glad that I could give her a little peace of mind, and the minister had better follow through for Katie* and for the thousands of other Albertans who need a little shred of hope under a bill that represents a tremendous degree of threat and uncertainty and stress and fear for Albertans, because that is what is happening here. None of us are immune from having a sick family member and wondering what is going to happen as a result of this relentless push to privatize from the UCP government.

Here's the thing, Mr. Speaker. Katie is also a health care provider. She's a team member with the primary care network, and she loves her job. She cares deeply about delivering the service that her patients need. So she's received a little bit of reassurance, but what assurances can she give her colleagues and her patients? It doesn't ever just stop at one person ever. Certainly she'd like it for herself and her family, her colleagues, and her neighbours, but she also wants it for people she doesn't even know. That's who we should be making policy for. It's for the people that we may never meet, that we may not ever have the privilege to get to know, but we can rest assured that the policies that we have implemented have in fact made their lives better. I don't believe that this government can confidently say that about Bill 11. So no matter who, no matter the procedure, no matter the test or the specialist, she doesn't want anyone waiting longer than absolutely necessary, and neither do we.

Bill 11 absolutely introduces American-style health care, but it also deepens Alberta-style health care, Mr. Speaker, a pursuit reinforced by this government that is absolutely creating and deepening two-tier health care. Indeed, we have some of that here in Alberta.

Just earlier today, hours ago over our break, I spoke with Patricia.* She and her husband are on a fixed income, as millions of Albertans are. She wanted me to share her immense disappointment with the UCP government that she had to pay \$100 for her COVID shot. It was a cost she could absorb, but she recognizes that there are many, many who cannot do the same. Two-tier. American-style, two-tier health care.

I also want to raise mental health and addiction services in Alberta. In fact, mental health services have been privatized for a very, very long time. We can call it a American-style, two-tier health care system. We can call it whatever other references. We've got it right here, and I want for Albertans to think about their experience of having to navigate a mental health care system that is predominantly private.

For more information I turn to the Canadian Mental Health Association. Forty-one years ago the Canada Health Act came into effect. It doesn't cover essential mental health care providers like counsellors, psychotherapists, and social workers. It doesn't cover ailments like eating disorders, addictions, or PTSD. As a result, while family doctors and psychiatrists are covered under public

health insurance, mental health care comes at a cost. The system places immense pressure on emergency departments and in-patient services at hospitals because it's only there that public health coverage kicks in. If a person can't access care when they first experience symptoms of illness, they may get sicker. With long wait times symptoms get worse, and sometimes, Mr. Speaker, people die.

Now, the conditions that have led to this challenge are different, but the experience for people accessing mental health services are not going to be that different from the challenges being created by Bill 11. Mr. Speaker, there is a significant two-tier system in mental health care. All we have to do – we're in it. We are in this scenario as we speak. Who amongst us hasn't felt immense relief for their group health benefits plan when we hear how much an hour of therapy costs? An hour with a counsellor or a psychologist can run over \$200. It's a highly privatized system and not something to be sought after, but for some reason the UCP government is chasing after it. We just have to purely look at mental health services. It is health care. Mental health services are undoubtedly health care.

These folks across the way, the UCP government, see no problem with the incredible inequalities and inequities in that system, where if you can afford the care, if you have the health benefits plan, then you can access critical, sometimes life-saving services, and if you don't, you have to wait until you are at such a point of crisis that the only place for you to turn to is the emergency department. This is what privatization creates. This is where the UCP government are sending us down. This is the road that they want us to travel.

A 2023 report from a Canadian university states that rural Canadians face mental health concerns to the same degree as their urban counterparts, that psychologists can be found in the public system but increasingly are choosing to work in private practice, in fee-for-service clinics. Sounds familiar? It is a cautionary tale, and it is one that is right here. It's not in Europe. It's not in America. It is right here. I think we should heed the warnings, Mr. Speaker.

The UCP government claims to love choice: choice in education, choice in health care though not reproductive health care, but we'll save that for another day. But this is only choice for those who can afford it. Bill 11 means that the majority of us will be left behind on wait-lists and queues that are only going to get longer because Bill 11 does nothing to increase capacity or improve access to our health care system. Nothing. It takes one long lineup and splits it into two, and the people who end up in the shorter one are those who can pay. Even those who can't pay but simply can't wait any longer, so they call on loans, they sell a home, they sell an extra car, whatever they do because they cannot live in agony and chronic pain any longer: that is not a choice. That is an impossible situation that we have put Albertans in.

10:50

From another constituent, Mr. Speaker:

I'm writing to point out some flaws ...

This is to the government.

... in your proposal for two-tier health care. The most obvious is that while those who can afford to pay will probably benefit, admittedly at a cost, and I wonder who's going to be making a profit from that cost, those who can't will face even longer wait times. The only way to improve wait times is to hire more health care providers, not to expect that existing providers will want to work longer hours.

Another writes:

Rather than stabilizing and strengthening the public system, your government is choosing to stretch it even thinner and prioritize those who can pay. A two-tier model will leave many Albertans behind and worsen the crisis your own policies have contributed

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

to. I'd say it's unconstitutional, but that's not something the government seems to be particularly concerned about at the moment.

Our health care system needs thoughtful, evidence-based investment, not ideology and improvisation. Consider team-based care. Consider centralized wait-lists that don't start only once a patient is assigned to a surgeon. Consider preventative health care like vaccinations, early detection, and accessible diagnosis, critical mental health services.

On behalf of the constituents of Calgary-Currie, Mr. Speaker, I beg the UCP: heed the advice of health care professionals, heed the advice of the warnings in our mental health care system here in Alberta already, and actually focus on improving health outcomes for ourselves and our loved ones.

They have wasted money, throwing good after bad; \$125 million for DynaLife down the tubes; nothing to show for it. I can't even say "lesson learned" at minimum because we've only seen a repeat of all of that: \$80 million for Turkish Tylenol that we cannot use, hundreds of millions of dollars for chartered surgical facilities, \$70 million in recovery treatment services to an apparently predetermined service provider with zero record of operating in Alberta. And there is nothing to show for it.

This is a government that has absolutely the fewest, the most minute demonstrations, indicators of actual outcomes to serve Albertans. When we're talking about value for dollars served, health care is by far the largest budget item in this entire government's cabinet, even larger given the administration of running four ministries where once there was one.

It's time that Albertans see through this and demand the outcomes, demand the measurement, and demand the respect of the expertise that is actually going to fix the health care system. Privatizing is not going to do it.

The Acting Speaker: Are there others who would like to speak to Bill 11? The Member for Edmonton-West Henday. Go ahead.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in absolute opposition to Bill 11, that will do absolutely nothing for Albertans except break down our public health care system. Perhaps in committee we can revisit the title because I do think it would be better titled as the American-style, Two-tiered Health Care in Alberta Act, something I think my friends on both sides of the aisle may want to be fully forthcoming to Albertans by making that change.

But worse yet, we have less time to debate this bill because the UCP has limited debate on this bill that will radically alter the health care system in our province, ushering in privatized health care and an American, two-tier health care system.

I oppose it because that is what the good people of Edmonton-West Henday elected me to do. They do not want privatized American-style, two-tier health care in this province. Full stop. They've not asked for this. In fact, the only reason the other side may be in their chairs right now was the Premier's assurance that no Albertan will ever have to pay out of pocket to see their family doctor or to get the medical treatment that they need. To quote someone that many millennials watching may remember from the *Maury* show, the Maury Povich show, "You are not the father." Oh, wait, that's not the one. Anyway, you get the gist. There was a detector in use.

But don't take it from me. Listen to my constituent Kim who wrote me and said:

Our marginalized populations will get the bottom of the barrel and that is not fair. They are the ones that need it the most. Instead of moving to for-profit just to gain more money off of everything else. We should be focusing more on health promotion and keeping people out of the hospital.

Mr. Speaker, I oppose this bill at a time when affordability is top of mind for all Albertans but especially for lower income Albertans, who will be the most impacted by this two-tier system. I share this sentiment for my constituent who took the time to write me and share her concerns with this House. As my wonderful friend the Member for Edmonton-Glenora warned us about, the increase in seniors' costs in this province, where this government is jacking up the premiums on seniors who have to pay for their maximum copay on prescriptions, and worse yet, they are now going to be the payer of last resort, forcing these Albertan seniors to get costly private insurance plans that deprive even more of the fixed incomes of these wonderful seniors during a time where they are barely making ends meet because of this government's ineptitude.

Mr. Speaker, Treaty 6 contains the medicine chest clause provisions. This provision allows for all status First Nations people across this country to access health care however they so choose, but this clause is specific to Treaty 6. It was truly revolutionary and visionary by our foremothers and forefathers who negotiated this clause into Treaty 6. At the time they saw that our medicines could not heal the sicknesses that were being brought in the blankets with the harmful substances brought here and the various other communicable diseases like smallpox that white settlement brought.

[Remarks in Cree] We're guided by the grandmothers that were there at treaty negotiations. Together they realized that our way of life was no longer going to be sustainable with the increase of white settlement. This was a teaching I learned in the first days of my law school journey, and while this government does not want me or anyone in this province to talk about this history in a good way and in an honest way, I am reduced to do so in debate because at the very least my speech will never be stifled to talk about all of the chapters in the province's history even when the government doesn't want us to.

Mr. Speaker, I bring up the treaty rights to health care because I see a concerning trend in Bill 11 that will be exacerbated by the federal government's ongoing attack against our treaty rights, and I'm not talking hyperbole; I'm talking fact. Our access to health care: this treaty right is inequitable now and will only get worse under Bill 11.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The federal government, under the noninsured health benefits program, has scaled back significantly what is and is not covered, so much so that First Nations are already tiered at the bottom rung of a system that is already under so much strain. First Nations people in Alberta have a significant health disparity in life expectancy, nearly 20 years lower than non-Indigenous Albertans: higher conditions of diabetes, asthma, arthritis, obesity, greater need for mental health support, and increased abuse of substances.

Mr. Speaker, I truly worry about this two-tiered, American-style health care system that Bill 11 will create. There are already too many barriers in place in the health care system that Indigenous people will fall even further to the bottom of the rungs of that system. I can tell you, as someone who receives noninsured health benefits, if I did not have secondary coverage, I would be absolutely prevented from accessing the health care system at all, but so many of my relatives – and, yes, I say "my relatives" because all First Nations people are my relatives – will not be able to access this uneven system. They are currently unable to do so because of this so-called private system that the minister likes to tout is already in place, and it is only going to get worse.

While the ministers or the Premier stand up and say that they work with Indigenous partners on private surgical facilities, the

UCP have not done their homework to know how this system does not serve our people. It will not serve our people because I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, NIHB barely covers the current public system. It is definitely not going to provide coverage for these private facilities that this government is creating in this two-tiered system. We are some of the poorest people in this province. We have been stripped of our land and the riches that built this province, yet we are still dying.

I already see the effects of the dental care system that was crumbling under the NIHB system and the province's meddling in that. This bill does that, too, and without the federal assistance that this government is also blocking.

11:00

Well, the writing is on the wall, Mr. Speaker. My people will suffer. We know the system will require a credit card rather than your health card. This is dangerous, what the UCP is doing. This is not European-style health care. Those jurisdictions have other safeguards in place like pharmacare, which my friend from Edmonton-Decore spoke to already in debate.

But I want to quote something my constituent Karen wrote to me about this European system that this government is referring to. She says:

We lived in England in the 1990s and experienced their two-tiered system. The NHS had enormous wait times for all surgeries, except if you could pay it's done quickly. We paid privately for an MRI for our son, which under the NHS would have taken 8 months to have it done. This is reckless, UCP has no medical experts working collaboratively on this policy.

The minister also rose to speak to compare ourselves to Quebec, who this government seems to keep modelling their legislation after time and time again. Nothing against Quebec – while I was in law school I was lucky to live in la Belle Province – but we seem to be picking and choosing when to compare ourselves to that province. Let's look at that data. The Canadian Medical Association warns against following the Quebec experience. They say:

Quebec's limited experience with private health care provides a cautionary tale. As more physicians leave Quebec's public system to offer private care, patients are left waiting longer. The result is that Quebec now requires that new doctors work in the public system for five years before they are allowed to practise in a private setting.

This, coupled with the comments from my constituent Karen and the comments from my colleague from Calgary-Klein, who shared their comments from one of her constituents about their experience in Quebec and Germany, the only places of residence where they had to pay for their health care – again, Mr. Speaker, the writing is on the wall. Bill 11 is setting this province up for some dark days ahead because the only thing this bill does is create more uncertainty in our public system to draw folks out of the public health care system. This is concerning for all Albertans because what the UCP is doing here is fundamentally altering the health care system for the next generation, yet here we are limited in debate. I'm so thankful to have been able to get up and speak in opposition to this American-style two-tier health care in Alberta act.

This is worrisome because low-income Albertans will be the ones that are most affected by these changes, and I echo the perspectives and concerns brought forward by Kim and Karen and the several other Albertans that I speak to who do not want this system. They know what it will mean for low-income Albertans, who will be the ones relegated to the public system. Experts have raised these concerns as well. The Canadian Medical Association, for example, said in that press release on November 18, 2025: "The evidence from around the world is clear: where a parallel private health system operates, both health outcomes and access to care are

worse." Mr. Speaker, it is shameful that we are here again focusing on the wrong priorities, the ones that Albertans did not elect any of us to focus on.

Mr. Speaker, when I reference all Albertans, I mean it. What is sneaky in this bill is the intentional use of the definition of "resident." Let's look at section 1(3)(i) and (46) of this bill, which inserts into the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act to define a resident as

- a person who is, in accordance with the regulations,
- (i) lawfully entitled to be or remain in Canada and makes the person's home and is ordinarily present in Alberta, or
- (ii) deemed by the regulations to be a resident.

Now, Mr. Speaker, while this may be innocent in the before times, presently this, coupled with the UCP's attack on diversity, residency markers on ID cards, and the rhetoric that has been spewed by the UCP as of late, is not innocent. In fact, I worry about new Albertans and new Canadians, who will undoubtedly be affected by this othering.

Mr. Speaker, while we are restricted from alleging anything in this House, Albertans are not misled. From the 2025 federal Report of the National Advisory Council on Poverty, I want to pull this quote from this report.

While poverty can affect anyone, it often results from discrimination. Black and racialized individuals, Indigenous people, newcomers, 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, people with disabilities, and seniors all shared how systemic barriers in housing, employment, education and access to services make them more vulnerable.

We have been screaming this from the mountaintops that vulnerable Albertans will be affected by bad UCP decisions, and Bill 11 is no different. Low-income Albertans will be affected by this American-style two-tier health care system act. Mr. Speaker, this bill furthers and exacerbates this access to services and further discriminates. This is not the Member for Edmonton-West Henday that is saying this; it is the National Advisory Council on Poverty. This, coupled with the changes put forward to prevent the access of services to new Albertans in this province, should cause many great concern, especially newcomers to this province. Alberta was calling and they arrived, yet we are now treating them as second-class citizens. I am incredibly concerned about the trajectory of this province.

While we look at the substance of Bill 11, the stripping of our ability to debate this bill and the many others that this government is limiting, and the ushering in of an American-style two-tiered health care system in Alberta is just bad. It's bad for Albertans. It's bad for the continuation and protection of public health care in this province. It is bad for the 20 per cent of youth in Edmonton and Calgary who are unemployed. It is bad for low-income Albertans. It is bad for the 2SLGBTQIA-plus community. It is bad for trans Albertans, who are also vulnerable members of our community. It is bad for seniors who are living on fixed incomes, who are worried about their pensions time and time again because this UCP government keeps threatening to come after them. It is bad for those same seniors who will have to pay more for prescriptions after being forced to pay for vaccines in this province, Mr. Speaker. Let that sink in. We are costing more dollars for vulnerable seniors, who are already stretched very thin.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans elected us to look after their best interests, and creating a two-tier system is not that. This bill needs to be scrapped, and we need to invest in our public health care system. It is for these reasons that I urge this Chamber to oppose Bill 11. Albertans never asked us to do this. They asked us to protect public health care.

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

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this evening and speak to my fulsome opposition to this Bill 11. In Canada our identity as Canadians is very much wrapped up in medicare, a bit of an old-fashioned term perhaps, but nonetheless it is there, our universal health care program.

In 2002 there was a report published by the Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada, and its commissioner, Roy Romanow, at the time wrote that "Canadians embrace medicare as a public good, a national symbol and a defining aspect of their citizenship." A national poll taken a full decade later, Mr. Speaker, found that 94 per cent of Canadians consider the country's health care system an important source of collective pride. That means that in Canada health care is a right, not a privilege, and this bill would have health care be a privilege, but only for those that can afford it.

11:10

Core components of the right to health, Mr. Speaker, include availability. That means that there needs to be sufficient quantity of functioning health facilities, goods, and services for all. Right now the UCP has made it that that is just not so. A core component of the right to health means that it needs to be accessible. That means that there is a requirement for health facilities, goods, and services to indeed be accessible to everyone. Accessibility has four dimensions: nondiscrimination; physical accessibility; economic accessibility, which, of course, implies affordability; and information accessibility. Again, we're having some challenges on that front already.

It needs to be acceptable, and that refers to a respect for medical ethics, making sure it is culturally appropriate, with some sensitivity to gender. Acceptability requires that health facilities, goods, services, and programs be people-centred, patient-centred, not profit-centred. They need to cater to the specific needs of diverse population groups and in accordance with international standards of medical ethics for confidentiality and informed consent. Mr. Speaker, this bill will make it much more difficult for all of us in Alberta to make sure that we indeed have an acceptable quality of health care.

Quality is a key component of universal health care coverage. They need to be safe, people-centred, timely, equitable, integrated, and I would argue that what we have now is so far from integrated that it is indeed unsafe for Albertans at the moment. That idea of people-centred and patient-centred is perhaps the most important cornerstone of a good, effective universal health care system, Mr. Speaker. That is where the UCP has failed each and every Albertan each and every single time. The push to two-tiered, American-style health care is just the latest salvo in their efforts to, quite frankly in my view, destroy our public health care in this province.

This is the government that decided that instead of listening to doctors, nurses, paramedics, lab techs, radiation techs, unit clerks, SLPs, primary care teams, anaesthesiologists, public health care experts, they decided they knew better, and the result is a health care system that is under siege. Along the way they've carved out four pillars, five, I guess, if you count shared services, with room for four ministers and other folks at the top while nurses, RNs, and LPNs continue to work short every single shift every single day; while paramedics right now continue to wait in ambulance bays with patients; while referrals to specialists and surgeons are certainly not getting shorter, they're just getting longer; and wait times for surgeries, particularly for those amongst us who are more complex, simply lengthen.

Folks like Lorna, a constituent, who I've spoken about before in this House, Mr. Speaker, are continually told: it's okay; you'll just

have to wait a little bit longer. Lorna has been waiting almost three years. It's unconscionable. The last time she heard from this government, it was an offer to send her to Toronto, except that she would have to pay to get there. She would have to pay for a hotel. She would have to pay for her husband to accompany her. In other words, she would have to pay. That isn't exactly universal health care coverage.

Hundreds of my constituents have noted over the last few days that American-style health care isn't the answer. All Albertans want, need, and deserve better health care, but right now they're grappling with all those longer than ever wait times, closed ERs, double-digit waits when ERs happen to be open, and less than timely access to their family doctor. Of course, Mr. Speaker, we all want more doctors, more nurses, more health care professionals. We all want less time waiting in emergency departments and shorter wait times for surgeries. We want a health care workforce that wants to work here and stay here and make a life here. We want Albertans to have the very best that today's health care can offer. That includes the opportunity to benefit from innovation, new technology, best practices that come from all over the world. But the crux of the matter is that the UCP is not offering what Albertans need.

We most decidedly do not want, Mr. Speaker, paying out of pocket. We don't want people to be able to jump the line, jump forward simply because they have the money to do so. We don't want that idea of pay to play anywhere near our health care system.

We've all heard those stories from the U.S., with American-style health care, where people owe at least \$220 billion in medical debt and the bulk of that debt is owed by people with over \$10,000 in debt. Everyone is entitled to access in Canada, and American-style health care is not access. If I may, Mr. Speaker, I'm just going to go on a wee bit of a tangent and talk about my own family's experience over the last couple of years with health care.

Around 2020-2021 my mother got very, very ill, and I will say that, unfortunately, her experience of our health care system was quite different than the experience my dad had. My mom had a doctor that had the ability to come to her house to see her when she needed him to be there, to go through that list of medications, to work with the pharmacist when Mom needed some adjustments in her medications. When she needed a test, she was able to get it sometimes in two or three months, but not in six or eight months or even a year. When she got a diagnosis that meant that she was terminal, she was immediately linked in to not just a palliative care team – and it was a team that involved her family doctor, Mr. Speaker – but she was also linked in to social workers, linked in to mental health specialists who specialized in older folks, in people who were seniors.

That whole time from that terminal diagnosis to her death in May 2022 took about a year or so, but the last six months of her life were spent with health care. It wasn't perfect by any stretch of the imagination, but she did have nurses who were able to attend to her. They were there. She did have health care aides who were able to attend to her. They were there. As I said, she was able to have her doctor come and visit her. She was able to have the pharmacist talk to my dad, talk to the doctor to make sure that everything was going well. At the very end of her life, Mr. Speaker, she was able to enter palliative care with planning and forethought. We knew that palliative care was coming a good six weeks before, so it was all set up.

Unfortunately, for my father, that wasn't the case. When my mother was sent off to the Sherwood Park hospital a couple of times, she was seen within an hour or two. When my dad was moved over to the Sherwood Park hospital, and I was with him most of those times, Mr. Speaker, it wasn't just an hour or two wait. It

was four, five, six hours because there were so many people already at that time in the waiting room. This was a mere year and a half later, a year and a half of this government deciding to implode the system.

When my dad got really, really sick and he ended up needing additional care, all of a sudden the nurses weren't there to come in and see him. Instead of having a doctor at the ready – it was a really, really lovely system that they originally had, but unfortunately many of the doctors who were part of that team had already left, Mr. Speaker. They weren't available. His doctor was fabulous, but now his doctor had many more patients than he ever thought he would have. Finally, when my father unfortunately fell and broke his hip, it meant waiting in an ambulance bay with EMS workers who were absolutely fabulous, but, nonetheless, waiting there for almost an entire day.

What it meant for my dad, Mr. Speaker, at the very end of his life, was waiting in a hallway in a hospital in this city about a year and a half ago, waiting in a hospital hallway with stretcher after stretcher after stretcher of other folks waiting in the exact same hallway because they couldn't even make it into the emergency department. They couldn't even get there. They were admitted, and where they were admitted to was a hospital hallway. No privacy. None. So when the doctor came and you had a conversation with the doctor, it was in full view of everyone else. Unconscionable. When we were able to get him into that emergency room, he was there for over two days.

11:20

He was 87 years old at the time, Mr. Speaker. And at the very end of his life, it wasn't spent in a quiet place; it was spent in an emergency room with all of those lights and bells and noise, and it has to be noisy because you're taking care of people in crisis. The reason he was there for that two-day period was because there weren't any beds available, and when he finally did get that bed – and, again, I cannot fault the health care teams that took care of my dad – cannot – they were stellar, but they were run off their feet. So when he finally got that bed, it was too late. He ended up with comfort care instead of palliative care. He should have been able to have palliative care, but it wasn't there. He should have been able to be in a quiet room at the end of his life, not just a few hours before the end of his life.

I would want that for everyone. This was a man who had given his life to this province. He had paid his taxes, he had done all the right things, and this is the way this government treats him at the end of his life. The sad fact of the matter is that it's not just my dad, and it's not just my mom. It's lots of dads, and lots of moms, and lots of grandparents, and lots of kids, and lots of aunts, and lots of uncles, and lots of friends.

This bill, Bill 11, won't fix it. This bill simply continues the destruction of health care, and this two-tiered health care that this government keeps on talking about will not help. The only thing that it will do is hasten the inequity in our health care system. It will mean that when my turn comes, I'm going to need to have many thousands of dollars to get that MRI that my doctor wants me to have, or when my turn comes, I'm going to make sure I've got \$22,000 so I can fly to wherever it is I have to fly to to get the operation to repair my hip. When my grandchildren's time comes, will there even be that, Mr. Speaker, or will it all be about how much money you have in your bank account, how much money you have on your credit card, how much debt you are willing to go into in order to simply access this right, the right to health care?

One of the challenges, of course, that we have is that many of us don't think about health care until we actually need it, and then our child breaks their arm, or something happens and we're just not

feeling our usual self, or there's some sort of complication after a routine test, or there's some sort of unwelcome news, and it's at those times when we as legislators, Mr. Speaker, are supposed to ensure that health care, that promise made to all Albertans, is there, and that it will be delivered in such a way that all of our children and our children's children, and all of our aunts and uncles, and all of our cousins, and all of our relatives all over Alberta get the health care they deserve.

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

Mr. Rowsell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's truly an honour to rise in this Assembly today in strong support of Bill 11, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2). Every day Albertans place their trust in the health system that they expect to be responsive, dependable, and focused on delivering high-quality care when and where they need it most. That expectation is not unreasonable. It is fundamental. Health care is not just another service; it's a cornerstone of our society and a reflection of our values.

When Albertans walk into a hospital, a clinic, or a pharmacy, they deserve confidence that the system will be there for them without delay, without compromise. Bill 11 represents the next major step in building a health care system that meets those expectations. It is a step towards a new era in health care, one that is patient-centred, sustainable, and responsive to the evolving needs of every Albertan, regardless of where they live or what their circumstances may be.

If passed, Bill 11 will amend several pieces of legislation to reflect Alberta's changing health landscape. It will strengthen the ability of health care professionals to deliver care, improve accountability and efficiency across the system, and ensure that our health policies are aligned with the realities of today and the challenges of tomorrow.

One of the key pillars of Bill 11 is protecting and modernizing drug coverage for Albertans. Mr. Speaker, prescription medications are often the first line of defence against illness and chronic conditions. They keep people healthy, prevent hospitalizations, and improve quality of life, but the way we manage drug coverage must evolve and remain fair and sustainable. The proposed amendments will ensure better coordination between public and private drug plans. By making private plans the first payer for those who have them, Bill 11 safeguards the long-term sustainability of taxpayer-funded programs while keeping them available for those who need them most, those without private coverage or those in vulnerable situations.

Mr. Speaker, this is not just about dollars and cents; it's about fairness and stability. It ensures that public resources are directed where they are most needed while still respecting the benefits that Albertans have earned through their employment.

Just as important, these changes protect older Albertans. Under Bill 11 employers will be prohibited from reducing or eliminating health benefits for employees aged 65 and older who choose to remain in the workforce. Mr. Speaker, this is a matter of principle. Albertans who continue contributing to our economy should not be penalized for doing so. They deserve the security of knowing that their health benefits will remain intact.

Bill 11 also introduces enhancements to the way physicians can practise in Alberta. For the first time in our province this legislation will establish a modern, dual-practice model, allowing surgeons and supporting surgical professionals to perform procedures in both public and private settings. This is not an experiment; it is a proven framework that exists successfully in some of the world's highest performing health systems, including Denmark, the Netherlands, France, Germany, and Spain. These jurisdictions have

demonstrated that dual-practice can coexist with strong public health care provided the safeguards are in place. Under this model physicians will gain greater flexibility to work in both public and private settings, while maintaining strict protections to preserve the accessibility and integrity of publicly funded health care.

What does this mean for Albertans? It means more surgeries and shorter wait times, a goal that every member of the Assembly should share. Mr. Speaker, let me be perfectly clear. The public health care guarantee remains fully intact. No Albertan will ever have to pay out of pocket for medically necessary surgeries. Life-threatening emergency surgeries will remain fully public, with no private option. Cancer surgeries will also remain entirely in the public system.

If passed, the dual-practice model will include restrictions from the outset and will be closely monitored to protect our health care system. Physicians engaged in dual-practice will be required to maintain separate records for public and private services, ensuring that no public funding subsidizes private care. Additional safeguards may include mandating that surgeons perform a minimum number of procedures in the public system to remain eligible for private practice, and restricting certain specialties to public practice if shortages would compromise public health.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to be clear about immediate restrictions. Family physicians will not be permitted to participate in dual practice at this time, and all emergency services, procedures, and cancer treatments will remain exclusively public. These measures reflect our commitment to balanced innovation with responsibility. Accountability is the foundation of trust. Albertans deserve confidence that every health dollar is used responsibly. Bill 11 strengthens building accountability and transparency by introducing clear penalties for systemic noncompliance. These measures deter improper billing practices and uphold the integrity of our health system.

Finally, Bill 11 modernizes health cards and information sharing. A new renewal process will reduce misuse and fraud, allowing cards to be seized if tampered with, and support secure information sharing across ministries all while maintaining strong privacy protection. Health information will be used responsibly to support team-based care and create a more connected health system.

11:30

Mr. Speaker, the proposed amendments in this bill represent more than technical changes. They represent a vision of a health system that is equipped for today, prepared for tomorrow, and worthy of the trust Albertans place in it. We know the challenges – an aging population, rising costs, and increased demand for services – but we also know opportunities available through innovation, collaboration, and renewed focus on patient-centred care. Bill 11 is about seizing those opportunities, ensuring that Alberta's health care system remains strong, sustainable, and responsive for generations to come.

This bill reflects our commitment to implement a free, focused health care system, one that recognizes the province's evolving needs, empowers health care professionals, and supports improved health outcomes for patients. It's about building the system that works for Albertans, not just today but into the future.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to support this legislation. I believe it represents a balanced, thoughtful approach to modernizing health care in Alberta. I encourage all members of this Assembly to support Bill 11 and join us in building a better health system and delivery as promised to every Albertan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, listen, no one's being really disruptive, but there are chats on both sides. If you could keep it

down a little bit, it would be helpful. We want to hear from the Member for Edmonton-South.

Member Hoyle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise and stand here to speak to Bill 11 in complete opposition. As far as I'm concerned, this is another notch in the UCP government's never-ending list of broken promises and another glaring example of this government being grossly out of touch with what matters most to Albertans. Bill 11 introduces the UCP's American-style, two-tiered health care system that undermines access, pulls resources out of Alberta's public health care system, and leads to longer wait times and poorer health outcomes.

This has been heavily researched, and there's hard evidence around the world. I have lived in two countries in this world that have this very system, and the evidence and data is clear. One of them is a European country. Some of the countries that they talk about and spew about, I have family that live there. I can tell you what it is like in that system every single day. I have family who've been born there and live through that. It's clear. This type of system reveals that budgetary adjustments for private health care are more than just a temporary measure.

These economic pressures of a two-tiered, American-style system in European countries, similar system, force individuals to have to save for private health care but, at the same time, reduces their disposable income and impacts their overall quality of life. As a result, consumers cut back on other essentials and cut back on their spending in the economy and their participation in the economy.

It also affects the well-being of these citizens. This financial burden hits especially hard on minimum-wage earners and those receiving unemployment benefits. We just recently had this government fail to support an increase to minimum wage, an incremental increase that was put forth by our side. These are the type of folks who already struggle to meet the basic needs of everyday life, like affordability for utilities, for food, for these types of items. As households attempt to cover the rising costs of health care, economic inequalities and outcomes worsen.

I just don't buy this shift here in what this government is putting forth. There's clear, hard evidence globally for at least a hundred years on this. It is clear that what's more of a focus is a focus on having a better outcome when it comes budget time and not on Albertans' health. It is clear from this type of system that when we have doctors in the public and they could charge private, they get to curate the type of patients they see, they end up being less experienced, and when there are complications in private, they end up in the ER, which is the public system, and it puts even more strain.

This government has done nothing while putting this horrible bill forward when it comes to putting patient care first. They have done absolutely nothing when it comes to: what are we doing to hire more folks who work in the public health care system? There are many things that can be done. Once again, I do not buy that this is somehow a panacea that is going to help us here in Alberta.

What I do know is that on this side of the House Alberta New Democrats care deeply about Albertans and their access to quality health care. We know that the priorities should be on doing whatever is possible to make sure that the people can be taken care of, take care of themselves and their families. Albertans work way too hard and pay too much in taxes already, as this government says, to be getting this type of poor-quality service in health care, bottom line. We don't break our promises here on this side of the House to support universal public health care; invest in doctors, health care providers in hospitals to ensure every Albertan has the health care they need.

This UCP government's track record on health care is abysmal at best, and Bill 11 proves this. It does nothing to address this. We will see in the long run in this province the repercussions of Bill 11. This government seems to be keen to show Albertans that they aren't interested in protecting their health care. After years of dismantling AHS, awarding questionable contracts, and wasting millions of dollars on privatization schemes, this government has shown that it absolutely cannot be trusted with the future of Alberta health and the health care of Albertans.

Currently, many Albertans are suffering daily in extreme pain waiting for surgeries, and some are even dying while waiting for surgery, diagnostics, and treatment. We've seen heartbreaking stories of Albertans getting cancer diagnoses and dying before they've even seen an oncologist.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate, but it is 11:38 and pursuant to Government Motion 19, agreed to on December 4, one hour of debate has now been completed. I am required to put to the Assembly all necessary questions to dispose of Bill 11, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2) at second reading.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:39 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Arcand-Paul	Elmeligi	Metz
Batten	Eremenko	Nenshi
Boparai	Ganley	Pancholi
Brar, Gurinder	Goehring	Renaud
Brar, Gurtej	Gray	Sabir
Calahoo Stonehouse	Haji	Schmidt
Chapman	Hoffman	Shepherd
Dach	Hoyle	Sigurdson, Lori
Deol	Ip	Sweet
Eggen	Irwin	Tejada
Ellingson	Kasawski	Wright, P.

Totals: For – 45 Against – 33

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a second time]

Bill 9

Protecting Alberta's Children Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

[Debate adjourned December 2: Ms Sigurdson speaking]

The Speaker: Edmonton-Riverview, you have 12 minutes remaining, please.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm grateful to have the opportunity to once again speak on Bill 9. The title of the bill is Protecting Alberta's Children Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, but it really is not protecting; it is attacking Alberta's children's statutes rights. It's a very – looking innocuous enough. It's just, like, three pages. It's not very long at all. But what it does is very serious and damaging to Albertans. It does fundamental things that, you know, I certainly stand against. I am not in support of this legislation. We know that Bill 9 is a continued attack on the protected rights of children. It goes against the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Alberta Bill of Rights, and the Alberta Human Rights Act.

The use of the notwithstanding clause was first used by the UCP against the teachers to force them back to work with no negotiated contract and no legal option to appeal. Now the UCP is using the notwithstanding clause to enforce illegal bills that take away the protected rights of vulnerable children.

Alberta's New Democrats condemn this legislation. This is not democratic governing; this is authoritarian governing. We stand with the teachers, the workers, with trans children, girls, and women and with all Albertans who deserve to know their fundamental rights must be respected and upheld. Alberta's human rights record is on the line with this legislation. It's being decimated by this Premier and this UCP government.

What's most fascinating, Mr. Speaker, is that the UCP claim to be champions for freedom and individual rights. For example, when the COVID-19 pandemic was under way the Premier was deeply concerned that rights were being denied to those who were unvaccinated. She declared that the unvaccinated are the most discriminated group in history. Bizarre. That certainly is not true, as discrimination has included the murdering of certain groups just because of a particular characteristic.

Yet here we are. When we are talking about trans youth, all of a sudden the Premier and the UCP are taking away fundamental rights. Mr. Speaker, this is called hypocrisy. Let's be clear on what this means. What's a hypocrite? A person who pretends to have beliefs, virtues, or moral standards that they do not actually have, especially when their actions contradict their stated beliefs.

Exhibit A is Bill 9, demonstrating the hypocrisy of the UCP, taking away the rights of the trans community. The UCP indeed are not champions for human rights, but rather pick and choose whose rights should be respected.

That's not how it works, Mr. Speaker. The Charter of Rights is for everyone, not just the people the UCP picks, and thus they have to use the notwithstanding clause, shielding their legislation from due process in the courts.

The hypocrisy of the UCP is outrageous. The harm this legislation is causing is profound. I received several letters from constituents, several phone calls that I'm honoured to share with this House articulating the damage the UCP is causing. I ask the members opposite to sincerely listen to my constituents' words because they're very important.

The first letter I'd like to share is this, and I quote:

I'm the parent of two transgender children, now young adults, and have been a caregiver and parental figure for a third trans youth. This third young adult was a teen when we first offered to be parental figures, specifically because their mother had rejected them for being trans. They were dealing with food insecurity, poverty, and an increasing risk of being homeless, all because of their efforts to be true to themselves.

My children are dealing with prejudice, fear, feelings of persecution, and extreme worry for others in the trans community. They worry that the medication prescribed by their

medical doctors and consulted with their pharmacist may be restricted or denied them at some point in the future. When they first received their hormone replacement therapy, one of my children said, "I finally feel human again." They both had immediate and sustained increases in mental health, self-confidence, self-worth, and increases in their performance in school.

11:50

Thirty years ago, I chose Alberta as the place I wanted to raise children, the place I wanted to start a business, and the place I planned to retire. My spouse and I have both led non-profit boards. I've taught board governance to many non-profits on behalf of the provincial government. The businesses I've led or founded in Alberta have contributed \$75 million to our province's economy in direct contribution and probably 10x times [more] in secondary financial impacts. My spouse has been interviewed on CBC and CKUA, and [has] been a featured artist at institutions and festivals in Alberta. Now, we are in active family discussions over whether we should move to a province that is willing to maintain the human rights, health care rights, and social and safety rights of all people. That would include taking my business, our talent, skills, and community involvement, our money and tax dollars with us to somewhere our children don't have to worry what new punitive legislation and erosion of their rights is coming next. Why should any citizen of Alberta have to worry about the provincial government getting to decide and legislate what name they use, how they identify themselves, whether they are allowed to use a public washroom, or whether they need anyone's permission besides their own doctor's for normal, safe, well-tested health care that is often the exact same medication and treatments as any other Albertan has access to?

Are we really the kind of society that is willing to drive up depression, anxiety, and suicide rates for a population already at risk, just for the sake of comfort over who gets to play which sport in school? What kind of dystopian trade-off is that?

Is legislating who is eligible for a trophy or ribbon in high school sports worth the literal lives of other children and teens? What parent has ever successfully controlled or influenced whether their children get a piercing, or a tattoo, or listened to the "wrong" music, much less control a child's identity or how they perceive themselves? Are we really willing to increase mental health disorders and the real-world impacts of depression, anxiety, eating disorders, dysphoria, and suicidal ideation only so that parents can feel more comfortable about their ability to control something they can never control, like who their child chooses to be for themselves in the world? Children are not property. Parents do not own them. Parents do not have the right to impose unnecessary physical and mental health risks on their children. The only thing a parent has the right to do is to love their child as unconditionally as possible. Everything else is an obligation they take on to protect the rights of their child and do their best to keep them safe. To deny a child's right to self-determination is the opposite of love and the antithesis of protection.

That's the end of one letter that I'm happy to have read into the record.

Here's the second one.

As [the] . . . parent of now-adult trans children, I've been increasingly distressed and deeply disappointed by the transphobic legislation now unethically enforced by the UCP government. Among many other lessons, we raised our children to understand and respect the concept of bodily autonomy – theirs and that of others. When they each came out as trans, there was no other response to give but "Congratulations!" because we all understood that act of coming-out [was] an act of authenticity and self-expression. What parent doesn't want their child to be the best, happiest version of themselves?

At the time, one of our children was a teen minor and the other was 18. This was during the NDP government, so both were able to access gender-affirming care. I'm not going to sugar-coat it. Accessing the care wasn't a panacea. Our children still experienced gender dysphoria, depression, anxiety. Of course they did. Too many people still don't understand that trans rights are human rights; our kids were worried [about] how they would navigate a world where anti-trans strangers could weaponize laws to ignore the right of kids like them to say what's right for their own bodies.

For our family, gender affirming health care has been the difference between our kids being forced to live with the ongoing, relentless, harmful, emotional, mental, and physical distress of gender dysphoria versus our kids having the space to explore their unique place in the world with curiosity, optimism, and safety – as every child, teen, and new adult deserves.

Knowing that other families, other trans children, are not getting the same opportunity here in Alberta is heartbreaking. Human rights are not a scarce commodity; they are not pie. Human rights are infinitely available; they exist outside of differences of opinion, of ideology, of culture.

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

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 9, Protecting Alberta's Children Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. I feel that Bill 9 is the most awful bill that we've debated in this House. There are other words to describe it, but none of them are parliamentary. I thought it was bills 26, 27, and 29 that we debated last fall, which unfairly targeted trans and LGBTQ2S-plus youth in health care, education, and sports. But no, it's this bill because this bill takes away the fundamental rights of Albertans by invoking the notwithstanding clause to remove the ability of Albertans to legally challenge them on breaches to their fundamental human rights.

The government has said that this is to protect children, but it's not; it's to protect themselves from potential legal action against laws they already passed that they asserted time and again were constitutional and fine. But if these laws are constitutionally sound, then the notwithstanding clause is not needed. But they're not constitutionally sound, Mr. Speaker. We've seen several challenges in the courts already. You don't protect people by taking their rights away. That's just ridiculous. It's condescending and a true demonstration that this government has no understanding of what they're actually doing to some of our most vulnerable Albertans.

This bill overrides Albertans' protected human rights in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Alberta Bill of Rights, and the Alberta Human Rights Act. That's three acts for human rights, all being violated by this government's insistence to insert themselves into the doctor's office, the psychologist's office, the locker room and sports field, the dinner table conversation where parents are trying to support their children to be who they are. The government does not belong in any of those rooms. Parents need to make these decisions with their children and doctors. They don't need the government to share their opinion, especially through legislation.

Last year when we debated these bills, I really focused my debate on Bill 29, the fairness in sports act, because I come from a very athletic part of the province. The Bow Valley has more Olympians per capita than any other community in the country, and although that's intimidating as heck when I'm at the Canmore Nordic Centre trying to cross-country ski, it's also something that I really love about my town. This whole community is sporty. It's so sporty. It's maybe too sporty. If you think you're good at an outdoor sport, come to Canmore and you will see that you are not good at it at all.

I love that about the Bow Valley. It's always challenging. We're always pushing the boundaries. We're always finding new ways to get your heart rate up and enjoy the beautiful Rockies. People move to Canmore and quickly spend all of their disposable income on gear, multiple bikes, ropes, skis, boots, packs, and more because the amount of fun that is to be had in the Rockies is boundless.

We make plans to go outside and climb and hike and bike and ski and paraglide and boat and paddle, and the list goes on and on. We do that with anyone who wants to go outside with us. It doesn't matter what gender they are, or how they identify, or whether they were a competitive swimmer in school, or whether they just started the sport last week, but it hasn't always been that way, and we are still growing as a community.

12:00

Tonight I want to share the story of someone who has recently inspired me in many ways, the story of Julianna Howatt, one of my unknown heroines. Julianna Howatt shared her love for the mountains and sports as a guide for more than 40 years, all while hiding her transgender identity for fear of losing her career, her friends, and everything that she had grown around her. In that career she guided hundreds of people. Perhaps most significantly to me, she was one of the pioneers to develop sport climbing at the back of the lake in Lake Louise. The back of the lake is one of the prettiest climbing crags I've ever climbed in my life, and Julianna set those climbs, all while pretending to be somebody else. It breaks my heart to imagine how difficult that was, and I wonder what she could have done if she was just able to be herself.

During those years Jules was more afraid of being outed as a transgender woman than she was of any of the risks the mountains could throw at her, from rockfall, to avalanches, or even the odd grizzly bear. In a film released at the Banff film festival this year, *Beauty In A Fall*, Jules talks about how she felt, that if people knew who she really was, her successful career and doing what she loved would all come crashing down. Jules was a self-described loner in school and suffered bullying, but in the mountains, she felt confident and free. Now she's sharing her story, hoping it will bring others to feel more comfortable to be who they are and foster connection. She kept her secret to keep her job and avoid the violence that she knew would result if people knew who she was. Imagine that fear. Imagine living every day in fear of being assaulted if you showed people who you are.

There are people in this province living that reality every day right now, and this bill makes it worse for them. That's just the straight-up truth, Mr. Speaker. I don't care what your ideology is, or how you feel about trans people or transgenderedness in the privacy of your own home, but the reality is that this bill makes life worse for people in our society, and our job is to make lives better. We are not doing that here.

Now Jules is using her story to mentor others through a group which aims to break down cultural barriers in alpine sports and foster a sense of belonging for diverse individuals. As a climber I am eternally grateful to Jules for her work setting some of the most iconic sport routes in the Rockies and pioneering a sport that I love. As a mediocre climber – because I will be honest with you: I'm not that great, but I love it – I also love to think that climbing belongs to everyone, because if it were only for the elite athletes, it sure as heck wouldn't be me, but I love the challenge. I love the purity of climbing a rock face on my own strength and balance, and the beauty of doing it at the back of the lake is unparalleled.

The truth is that the mountains don't care who you are, or who you sleep with, or what you wear, or what pronouns you use, or what you like to call yourself, or even if you want to climb in a dress with a harness. It's very uncomfortable. I do not recommend it, but,

hey, you do you. There is something so beautiful and freeing about that space, and truly everyone belongs there.

Jules' film was so loved at the film festival in Banff, and so was she. On the day Bill 9 was introduced Jules posted this on her Facebook page. Quote.

A few days ago, a room full of strangers stood for me after my film. A few cried. They held my story with such kindness that I felt for the first time in my life what it is like to be fully seen as a transgender woman and welcomed without conditions. Today the Alberta government used the notwithstanding clause to target trans kids, not to protect them, not to understand them, but to control them and legislate their futures into someone else's comfort.

I need you to hear this from someone who was once a trans kid herself. This kind of legislation is not neutral; it's cruel. It tells a child that something about them is unwanted and that the only way to stay loved is to hide who they are. I survived that message barely; not everyone does.

Tonight I'm holding two truths that do not belong together: the beauty of a room rising in kindness and the cruelty of a government trying to erase kids who haven't even had a chance to stand up yet. If my story touched you at all, I want you to know this: somewhere in Alberta a child is living the beginning of the story I was never meant to survive.

Unquote.

I am eternally grateful to Jules, not just for the roots that she set but for having the courage to share her story because it is an incredible reminder, Mr. Speaker, of what is actually happening when we implement these bills.

This September when Bill 29 came into effect, parents were asked to sign a declaration that their daughters were born as girls at birth. I received dozens of e-mails from constituents expressing disgust and concern over this idea. Canmore is a sporty place. Everybody wants their kids in sports. Parents were just outright outraged, to be honest, that they had to somehow prove their daughter was a girl. It's insulting. Parents of boys weren't asked to do this, just girls. And the fact that anyone can challenge the gender of a girl athlete, at which point the parent would have to prove their child's sex with a record of birth, is a massive invasion of privacy, and it protects no one. I want to be clear, just as I was last year, that the biggest threat to girls in sports is the risk of being assaulted or treated inappropriately by male coaches and staff. It is not the totally nonexistent risk of sharing their sport with a trans girl.

Now, this bill actually puts girls further at risk by potentially having to prove their gender to anyone who doubts it. As a woman with daughters I can tell you how this enrages me and how afraid it makes me for girls. This requirement could actually lead to more abuse of women and girls in sports by coaches and male staff who are already crossing boundaries and inappropriate behaviour. Now girls in sports, who are already more vulnerable than boys in sports, are becoming even more vulnerable. If you don't have the paperwork, how do you prove you're a girl? What if there isn't time, and you want to get out on the field, how do you prove you're a girl? It is awful to put girls in this position and increase the risk of promoting inappropriate, potentially abusive behaviour. And then to not be able to appeal these requirements through the courts. Ew. Just ew.

While this may be an unintended consequence, I am not the only mother who has felt it. Enrolment in school sports has been affected. Ten schools in the Edmonton school board who had soccer girls teams no longer do. Some girls in my riding have refused to sign the form on principle, and therefore cannot play sports. Parents may forget to sign the form. All of this reduces the number of girls that have access to and feel comfortable playing sports in school and all for some made up fear that trans girls are somehow making this a totally unfair situation. It's absolute garbage.

Males in sports truly dominate all professional sports. They get paid more, they get better ice and field time, they get better sponsorship, better facilities, and more recognition. This bill further contributes to the dominance of men in all aspects of sport by actually excluding women and girls from sports, all women and girls, and then removing the right to appeal and question the legality of these decisions is a gross misuse of power. With this bill the government is blocking a parent's ability to challenge these laws in court. They are preventing parents from defending their children. I can't even – ugh.

12:10

To our trans community in Alberta, I see you. I hear you. I affirm you. I appreciate you so deeply. Thank you for being your beautiful self around me and showing me new things in this world. Thank you for being the amazing people that you are. Thank you for sharing your story when you're ready. You have a right to exist as you are, and a right to legally challenge a government who tries to take that away from you, just as any Albertan has the right to defend their human rights in a court of law when those rights are being violated. Trans people are no different. Trans rights are human rights. It is the simplest way to explain this.

The fact that we are here debating this bill is so egregious. I say right now to our trans community, to our LGBTQ community, to our pride community across the province: Alberta's New Democrats will never use the notwithstanding clause to revoke Albertans' fundamental rights. I can't believe I have to say it out loud, but here we are. I truly find it abhorrent that anybody could take away human rights and defend it in the way that this government is doing.

Thank you.

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 9, Protecting Alberta's Children Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, a title that does none of the things and is totally a smokescreen for rhetoric that this government has decided to try to use to justify, basically, taking away the rights of individuals to have due process within our court system and in fact, I would say, does the opposite of what this government is pretending that it does. I can't believe we're here having this conversation. I am extremely disappointed in the government that over the last six weeks that we have been here, all I have seen is legislation after legislation after legislation that has targeted communities and individuals, that has deliberately taken away the rights of different groups that this government disagrees with, and that has actively inflamed rhetoric to try to justify the attack on communities.

I think we need to start with the fact that we have currently – we have two now – but we had three bills in this Legislature that have been introduced in the last six weeks. The first was Bill 2 with the notwithstanding clause for teachers. They were looking for abiding arbitration – a court process – to come up with a legal contract with the government on their salaries, on their benefits, and on their working conditions; a court process that would have been ratified and would have been a binding contract. The government: "We're going to put a bill in and we're going to take that right away. We're not going to let that happen. We're not going to let you have due process in that process."

Then we see Bill 9 introduced, and the whole reason that this bill is here is because of the fact that the government chose to introduce three pieces of legislation last year in December, had them passed, and then had citizens step forward and say, "This is not okay. This is against my rights as an individual, and I say no, and I'm going to

go to the courts and I'm going to file an injunction," which was honoured by the courts, and now the government says, "Oh, no, we can't have that, so we're going to take that right away and we're going to introduce this piece of legislation so that can't happen."

Now we have Bill 11, the referendum question, which of course, the government doesn't like that either, so now they've written a bill so that they can rewrite the question, which was literally ruled on yesterday in the court system, which said that the way that the legislation was written, that the way this referendum was written, doesn't align with the legislation and therefore would have been ruled out of order. Because of that, the government has now come in and reset the application process. This government can't realize that citizens, that Albertans, that humans in this province have a right to have their voices heard, have a right to have their human rights protected, and do not have the right to have this government come forward and decide to take them away, but that is what they are doing. That is all this bill does.

The parents of the children that this bill is supposedly going to protect did exactly what parents do. They said: "This does not protect my child. This takes away my child's rights, and I'm going to stand up and protect my child and I'm going to go to court and I'm going to make sure that these three pieces of legislation that are removing my child's rights are struck down." The government just couldn't have it. They are so fascinated with this, so fascinated with parents seeking medical advice on behalf of their children to make sure that they grow up to be healthy adults that they just can't stand it.

Yet they all stand up and say: "I'm a libertarian. I'm libertarian. I'm a conservative. I'm a libertarian." The whole definition of a libertarian is an advocate or supporter of a political party that advocates only minimal state intervention in the free market and the private lives of citizens, private lives of citizens. Hello, friends over there. Want to remember your definition of who you're supposed to be?

The Speaker: Hon. member, respectfully, through the chair, please.

Ms Sweet: It's okay. They're not here anyway.

The Speaker: Pardon me?

Ms Sweet: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The government says that they are libertarians and they advocate for civil liberties.

Mr. Williams: Will the member accept an intervention?

Ms Sweet: No, I will not.

The government has an opportunity to stand up and fight for the rights of kids and not take their rights away, and now they want to do an intervention. Absolutely not. This bill should be struck down. It should be removed from the Order Paper and, it should never be seen again.

My whole career before I got elected was making sure kids were safe. I saw the worst of the worst when it came to when we had to do intervention services for children. I saw kids getting kicked out of their home for telling their parents that they were gay and having to find places for them to stay so that they were safe. I pulled a girl off the High Level Bridge because she was going to jump because she got kicked out of her home for being who she truly is, and this government wants to tell me that this is protecting kids: no idea. Absolutely none. No idea what children who are trying to grow up to be adults to be their true selves actually deal with on a daily basis. The amount of risk that they are at when they come out to their

parents who do not believe in who they truly are: it is dangerous. It is absolutely, fundamentally dangerous.

These bills put kids at risk. This bill will hurt children. It absolutely will, and the government can shake their head at me all they want. I have seen it. I have seen what will happen to children when their parents will not stand up and protect them, and this doesn't do it. It absolutely does not.

What does it parents having the right to seek medical attention for their children to make sure that they have the medical supports that they need to be able to grow up to be adults, to not be at risk, to be able to get mental health supports, to be able to get hormone therapy if that's what their doctor deems that they should have.

It's not up to me to decide what a doctor does in a doctor's office with a family to talk about the medical needs of an individual, and it isn't anybody's business in this room, period. This takes it away. Protecting children. Good gracious.

12:20

You know, we have an act in this province. It's called the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. You know what it does? It protects kids when they're at risk of abuse or harm and a variety of things. I can tell you that the only time I ever had to get involved with a family is when they put their child at risk for abusing them because they came out as being gay, not because they told their parents they were gay and their parents were like: let's find you some medical assistance to make sure that you get to grow up to be a healthy adult. In fact, I would have high-fived those parents. Thank you for worrying about your child's development, about their emotional development, and about their physical development. I loved parents like that. It was parents that neglected their children's medical needs that I was concerned with. That was child abuse, not seeking medical advice. Trying to get professionals in their child's lives to help them grow up: how is that a problem?

This government is flawed in so many ways, and I'm so tired of sitting in this Chamber and this government pretending that they're standing up for Albertans when all I see is harm over and over and over again, targeting of children that they may not understand. You know what? You don't have to understand, but it's really none of your business.

There is such a theme this session. It is about power, and it is about creating a division, and it is disallowing the voices of Albertans to stand up for themselves and to have due process. That is authoritarianism, whether the government wants to hear that or not. They've been super agitated the last couple of days, and I would be, too, if I realized that I was trying to strip away the human rights of Albertans. Like, feel bad about it. You absolutely should.

I've had enough, and Albertans have honestly had enough. I literally had a staunch conservative come up to me the other day when I was at an event who was like: "Heather, you keep doing what you're doing." Sorry, the MLA for Edmonton-Manning. "Keep doing what you're doing. Tell your team to keep doing what they're doing because I have been a conservative my whole life but I have somebody in my family who's trans, and I don't believe in what this government is doing anymore." Wrong side of history. Absolutely wrong side of history.

And the government is smiling over there. It's not a joke. It's actually really disrespectful. It just shows the lack of humility and the lack of awareness around what this government believes because they continuously keep hurting people with legislation and ignoring what people are saying, and then when they do say something they go to the courts and they shut the court down. They say: it doesn't matter what you have to say; we're going to shut that down so you can't say it. I don't know how anybody could be proud of that. It's not anything to be proud of. It is so much about power

and us against them and, like, all of the things that I am proud of, which is ensuring that I live in a world where people are loved and welcomed and nurtured. I believe that most Albertans feel that way. I think most Albertans are completely disenfranchised with what they're seeing from this government. Like, I just can't even.

You know, it is a big deal to think about the families that are impacted by this bill that actually were courageous enough and stood up and went to the courts and said: "I'm going to fight for this. I'm going fight for my children and make sure that their voices are heard." And for this government to say: we're going to introduce a piece of legislation and we're going to shut down your process. The reality of it is that you can shut it down, but people aren't going to stop standing up and fighting. Unfortunately, we've seen a history like this before, but you know what always happens in histories like this? The people that are the ones that are being told to sit down and stop talking are the ones that always stand up and win, and we will win this one.

The government really needs to take a look in the mirror, as one of their famous Conservatives once said, and really think about how they're undermining the administration of justice. That is what's happening. You don't get to use the power of this Chamber to shut down the voices of Albertans and then take away their judicial opportunity and think that that's a winning strategy. It may not happen today, but it'll happen soon, and this government won't be sitting there because Albertans will have enough. They do deserve better, and every member that is sitting in this Chamber and watching this deserves way better than what this government is doing.

It makes me angry. It makes me angry on behalf of the children that are being ignored. It makes me angry on behalf of the families that deserve better, and it makes me angry that the government says one thing and does the complete opposite and pretends to be one thing, libertarians: free market is great, and we don't want anything to do with your bedrooms, yet we sure want to talk about it a lot.

The Speaker: The hon. minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I think the remarks from the members opposite are exactly why this bill is necessary. You know, it's clear that the members opposite do not view parents as the ultimate caregivers of children. They certainly don't view parents as the ultimate educators of their children. They believe that's the state, and they criticize the bill for not protecting children. Are the members opposite aware that 14 Albertans 17 and 16 years of age have had gender-related surgeries in Alberta over the last four years, and will they go on record supporting that? I don't think so. I think they know that that's wrong and that shouldn't happen.

The vast majority of parents, despite what the members opposite have stated tonight, unconditionally love their children. Full stop. And we have processes in place to intervene when they don't, but those bad parents do not mean that there's something that requires hormone therapy or surgical alteration of 17- and 16-year-olds, which has occurred multiple times in the last four years. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, there are pretty disagreeable words going back and forth, but it's been pretty respectful, and we're all listening. Let's just carry on with that, please.

Mr. Jones: What does this bill do? This bill protects girls and women, preserves their opportunities, gives them space. It enshrines parents as the ultimate educators and caregivers of children, and it protects children, 17- and 16-year-olds who in this province . . . [interjections]

The members opposite, if you want to go on record supporting 17- and 16-year-olds having gender surgery in Alberta, you can do so. I will support this bill and stop it. You can show me a poll that showed 100 per cent of Albertans would oppose it, and I would still support this because I'm going to protect children every day that I'm in here. [interjections]

You can enter the debate. Mr. Speaker, the member opposite can join the debate if she's . . .

The Speaker: I really am hoping not to get advice. When I stand, you've got to stop talking. The member who is talking needs to go talk through the chair, and the member on the other side needs to stop talking altogether until the turn comes. Let's try that.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we can all agree that 17- and 16-year-olds in Alberta do not require surgical alteration, and I think we can all agree that the vast majority of parents unconditionally love their children in this province. In the unfortunate situations where that is not the case, the members opposite are aware that we have protections in place for those children, imperfect as they may be. But the answer is not to further distance other children from their parents. That would cause even more harm. So I'm proud to support this bill. I'm proud to protect women, girls, children, and to enshrine parents as the ultimate caregivers and educators of children, things the members opposite will not do and have not done.

12:30

When I've shared what has happened to Alberta's children with my constituents, they're mortified. They can't believe that there are people who would promote and defend this. I would encourage the members opposite, if they feel so strongly about continuing this activity in Alberta, they should put their name behind it, but they won't. Not one of them will. But I'll put my name in stopping it when I vote for this bill today.

Thank you. [interjections]

Sixteen. Look it up.

The Speaker: Member, order, order. The only one . . . [interjections] Both of you, stop.

Members, we're only going to hear now from the Member for Sherwood Park and no one else.

Edmonton-Whitemud, do you hear me?

Ms Pancholi: I hear you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Show me a sign. Okay.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Kasawski: Mr. Speaker, I don't know if I'll have a chance to speak up again in this House, so let me just take this moment to say, "Merry Christmas" to all the people in Sherwood Park.

To start off my debate on Bill 9, I'd like to talk about the tyranny of the anecdote. Watch a story on *Fox News*; ban automated ballot counters in municipal elections. Hear a story about a doctor in Ponoka who billed too much; blow up the billing system for family doctors, and while you're at it, blow up the whole Alberta health care system. Heard a story about a person collecting AISH that doesn't look disabled; let's cut back all of the federal disability payments, put that into general revenue, and create a two-tiered AISH system in Alberta while we are at it. Know a story about a boyish-looking girl that was playing high school basketball; set women's rights back a hundred years and override the rights of a select group of Albertans.

Why is it so important to defend the rights of trans people even if someone disagrees with the way they present themselves to the world? I think because people refuse to think about the bigger principle involved. If you allow the government to take away the rights of someone that you disagree with, you allow the government to usurp the rights of everyone, and they may come after your rights next. That is exactly what we have seen this year.

The UCP manufactured the teachers' strike with our school kids as pawns. They took away the rights of teachers for free association, which include the right to strike, which is just a group of people withholding their labour, as is their right, along with the workers they are associated with. The UCP took away the rights of teachers in a situation that did not require the use of the notwithstanding clause to circumvent the courts and eliminate the traditional check on the Premier's power. Some say they did it to normalize the use of the notwithstanding clause in Alberta so they now could bring forward legislation that takes away human rights for a minority group.

To the trans kids in Alberta, I want you to know that we are adults and we're going to fight for you. We will fight to keep you safe in your community. We will fight to allow you to thrive in Alberta. Your journey and your struggle for identity is difficult enough. No government has the right to legislate intolerance. They have the power, and that is a problem. Their abuse of power will be their undoing, but they do not have the right to intrude into your life, oppress you, and make you feel unwelcome or unsafe.

To girls playing sport, I want you to know that we are adults and we will fight for you. We will fight to the end of this repugnant discrimination against you by members of the Legislature. It is astonishing to me that this government has required girls, not boys, only girls, to the humiliating requirement that they attest to their gender identity in order to play sports and in the most ridiculous of all regulations enshrined in law, a requirement that a girl, not a boy, only a girl, will be required to prove that they are. If anyone wants to challenge them, they would have to prove their sexual identity.

I am embarrassed that in 2025 the fight for gender equality has taken such a dramatic step backwards in Alberta because of the wrong-headed ideas of some members of this Legislative Assembly. They're giving power over female athletes to some stranger to say: "I don't think you're a real girl. Prove it." They are giving power over female athletes to men to check their body, and if you think anything other than that will happen, you are in denial. You are risking so much so that you can pretend that you're defending fairness in sport; fairness in one match, in one game, in one tournament, in one competition.

If you want fairness in sport, fund women's sports in Alberta to the level you fund men's sports. Add up all the public money you have directed to arenas and facilities for men's professional sports in Alberta and give that to women's sports. Spend as much money on women's sports as you spend on men's sports, and you might achieve a level of fairness and a definition of fairness that is broad and inclusive and transformative. Instead, you are giving power to men over girls to require them to prove they have a vagina in order to play sports. Then you are giving power to strangers to challenge their right to play sport. You are risking too much.

It is estimated that there are 12,000 transgender and nonbinary Albertans; .12 per cent of our population, one in 10,000 Albertans. Our women: you're going to give power to men over all the girls so that you can make sure that one in 10,000 girls is not a trans girl that wants to play sports. You are risking too much. You are trampling on the rights and freedoms of every girl in Alberta in order to make sure that one in 10,000 of them do not compete in sports, and you are doing it in the name of fairness.

Mr. Speaker, I checked the government's website. There are approximately 30,000 13-year-old girls in this province. Three of them might be trans, and we are going to trample on the rights of all women and all girls so that we can make sure that three, that are struggling for their own identity, are not going to play competitive sport. They're the same as you follow all the way through; 17-year-olds: 30,000 17-year-old girls in this province. Three might be trans, and you are going to trample on all women's rights so that you can make sure there's fairness in sports. You could invest an equal amount as you do into men, and you would achieve so much more, and it would be so much better for Alberta.

To the doctors that care for patients, I want you to know that we will fight to protect your freedom of conscience, we will fight to restore your evidence-based care in Alberta, we will fight to protect your patients' access to vaccinations and reproductive care, we will fight to keep politicians out of the examination room and restore your patients' rights in Alberta. To the parents that love your kids, that want them to grow up in a welcoming and safe society, we will fight for them alongside you.

We have before us the clearest of language: legislation in Bill 9 brought forward by the UCP will take away the fundamental rights of Albertans. Bill 9: this act shall operate notwithstanding sections 2 and 7 to 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, fundamental freedoms, legal rights, and equal rights. The act shall operate notwithstanding the Alberta Bill of Rights. This act shall operate notwithstanding the Alberta Human Rights Act.

When anyone's rights are oppressed, everyone's rights are at risk. Every unionized worker here in Alberta, every woman, every girl is on notice. The rights you enjoy are being oppressed. You can be discriminated against. Your opportunities in Alberta can be limited. I've talked in this House before about the journey from intolerance to tolerance to affirming. Well, the UCP is affirming in legislation; it is affirming intolerance into legislation, and it is infuriating because they do not have the right. They may have the power for now, but they do not have the right to impose an ideological zeitgeist, wrong-headed ignorance, and intolerance onto others.

We are supposed to be a society of tolerance, a society of democracy. People are people. You be you, and I'll be me. How did we get to this moment in our province when intolerance, discrimination, and sexism could be enshrined into law? And for what? It's not clear. So some bully can tell a girl to prove that she's a girl. MLAs refuse to think about the bigger principle that is involved, do not care about individual rights. They think they need to impose their own beliefs on others. They cannot let people be people. Instead they have chosen to legislate intolerance into the province, intolerance that will shame, harm, and scare children. It's terrible.

12:40

Let's keep in mind the trade unions: doctors, nurses, teachers, health care workers, educational assistants. They came for the trade unions. Well, the trade unions in Alberta have spoken. Let's make it known to the wider public. Every chapter of the firefighter union in this province cancelled meetings with the government the moment the UCP voted to override the rights of teachers in this province.

The government took away the right of association. It took away the constitutional right to strike from teachers, and the firefighters stood up. Our heroes stood up to stand alongside teachers, to stand alongside vulnerable children, to stand alongside girls. Firefighters are standing up for their principles because they understand that when you allow the government to take away the rights of someone

you disagree with, you allow the government to usurp personal rights, and this government has proven they will take away the rights again and again.

Let us go to the people of Alberta. Let us find out. Do they want authoritarianism that has crept in from the other side of the House to govern this province with malice, with incredible incompetence, without integrity, and without accountability, or do Albertans want an ethical, competent government now? Let's test the voters. Stop hiding. It's clear that if you thought you could take away people's rights with no consequences, then you are not fit for government, not in Canada.

We cannot become desensitized to this shift in our democracy. This is not politics as usual. This is also not a left or right issue. Conservatives and progressives in Alberta are equally concerned about the direction that the UCP is taking our province because there does not seem to be any space for reasonable people in the UCP political tent. The UCP government has invoked the Charter's notwithstanding clause four times now, taking away the rights of select groups of Albertans. They did this to shield undemocratic laws from court challenges. On occasion when judges determine that a law created by elected representatives is unconstitutional, they are doing the job that elected representatives gave them.

Judges play a critical role in the iterative process of our democracy. We need checks and balances. It's a problem if a law is found to be unconstitutional by judges, because it means it's unenforceable. It is then sent back to the government to decide if they want to fix it or pass the law notwithstanding the fact that it overrides a person's Charter rights. That is a big problem for the UCP. They don't like opposition even though it is a part of our healthy democracy. They don't like reasoned debate. They don't like to be held accountable for their policies and decisions. Our democracy is something that we make. It is something that we invest in and work on every day. We choose our direction forward. We need competent, ethical provincial government that represents the priorities of Albertans and values democracy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. You've got about 30 seconds.

Member Irwin: I've got 30 seconds. I've got 30 seconds. Why is that? Because this government decided to use time allocation on these incredibly important bills, and I'm going to use this very brief time to quote trans community members, folks with lived experience. If the UCP feels this bill, Bill 9, and bills 26, 27, and 29 are justified, then why are they pre-emptively invoking the notwithstanding clause? Let me point that out that if this bill is so important . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members.

Member Irwin: Such a shame. Such a shame.

The Speaker: When I stand, you must stop talking like everybody else does in here. Pardon me? Thank you.

Pursuant to Government Motion 18 agreed to on December 4, 2025, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of Bill 9, protecting . . . [interjection] Hon. member, don't, please.

Pursuant to Government Motion 18 agreed to on December 4, 2025, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of Bill 9, Protecting Alberta's Children Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 in second reading.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:45 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Arcand-Paul	Eremenko	Metz
Batten	Ganley	Nenshi
Boparai	Goehring	Pancholi
Brar, Gurinder	Gray	Renaud
Brar, Gurtej	Guthrie	Sabir
Calahoo Stonehouse	Haji	Schmidt
Chapman	Hoffman	Shepherd
Dach	Hoyle	Sigurdson, Lori
Deol	Ip	Sweet
Eggen	Irwin	Tejada
Ellingson	Kasawski	Wright, P.
Elmeligi		

Totals: For – 45 Against – 34

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a second time]

12:50 Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Statutes Repeal

15. Mr. Schow moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to section 3 of the Statutes Repeal Act, SA 2013, cS-19.3, the following statute, appearing on the list of statutes to be repealed which was tabled in the Assembly by the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly on behalf of the Minister of Justice on March 26, 2025, Sessional Paper 917/2023-25, not be repealed:

1. Ensuring Fiscal Sustainability Act, 2019, c18, sections 1(1) to (10) and (13).

The Speaker: Is this debatable?

Mr. Schow: Yes.

The Speaker: Okay.

Anyone who wants to speak on this? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to speak to this in the middle of the night. I cannot support Motion 15, which preserves the option for the government to restrict physician billing numbers geographically. This idea was a simplistic solution that had been proven to have severe unintended consequences in the past. This plan to restrict billing numbers geographically was part of Tyler Shandro's and the UCP's very effective strategy of chasing away doctors in 2019, which has left us where we are now, but it can always get worse. The section of the bill, supported by current members of this government . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Folks, it's just easier if the person that's recognized can be heard.

Dr. Metz: The section of this bill, which was supported by current members of this government, is well known to be totally ineffective in building the rural workforce, which was the intent. In fact, it reduces the overall workforce. New physicians simply go elsewhere, where they won't face these restrictions.

Let's look back in time. In 1983 the B.C. Social Credit government brought in a series of bills to limit physicians' ability to work in urban areas. The original plan was not allowed by the courts. The plan was called Orwellian by the presiding judge, Chief Justice Allan McEachern. I guess they did not think of using the notwithstanding clause at that time because it was only a couple of years old, or maybe they just understood its original intent. However, the Social Credit government decided that the court ruling just meant that they couldn't use that existing law, so they simply made a new one. Hey, sounds kind of familiar, doesn't it? Change the law if you're not getting what you want. Even Prime Minister Mulroney at the time criticized the provincial government. It seems like this government is doing much the same. They just can't be trusted.

In 1985 that government came out with a new law. The Supreme Court initially upheld it, but the Court of Appeal overturned it in 1988. Restricting billing numbers to a geography was not allowed.

Meanwhile, over several years new physician numbers declined by two-thirds in B.C., leaving them with a huge deficit of physicians, which they've never yet recovered from although I think that now a lot of Alberta physicians are moving there, so they're starting to make some headway.

Meanwhile in 1992 New Brunswick also was limiting physician billing numbers, in a slightly different way, in order to bring more people into remote areas; instead, the physicians simply left the province or failed to set up in New Brunswick.

Finally, 26 years later, in 2018, they dropped this failed strategy. It had never been effective in recruiting physicians to any area of the province, rural or urban. Physicians who were considering New Brunswick often told the medical association that they were reluctant to locate there because of the restrictive billing number practice. If only governments would learn from the experience of other governments.

New Brunswick and Nova Scotia tried this failed strategy, and by the time they took it out the Minister of Health in New Brunswick said: the physician billing number system no longer works for this province; it is flawed because it restricts the number of physicians who actually practice here and restricts the mobility of physicians and impedes recruitment. New Brunswick was not able to recruit using this measure. It was a bully tactic. It's a way to exert control. However, physicians simply react with their feet and go elsewhere.

This part of the bill is consistent with the rest of the UCP and Shandro's Chase Away Doctors Bill. It bullies and disrespects. That bill sent a strong message to learners and early career physicians as

the government also tore up a contract with the physicians. This government cannot be trusted. We cannot trust what they say even when there's a written contract. They've then defunded health services by moving money to contractors, building their bureaucracy and overpaying for contracts to their friends. Physicians have fled and continue to flee. This clause will not help build trust. Let it die. Give a simple sign of good faith.

So what can be done to build the health care workforce? Please use proven strategies. There are many that are well known, and they apply to nurses, paramedics, and allied health professionals as well as to physicians.

First is build trust. Well, I'm sure that it's a bit too late for that in the health care circles, but it is a proven strategy and the rest of us will build trust and have a strong basis for that. Maybe you can recruit in the future . . .

The Speaker: Hon member, this'll go easier if you do it through the chair.

Dr. Metz: Okay.

Second, develop a plan. If you fail to plan, you plan to fail. Restricting billing numbers is not a plan. You need data. The uninformed answer to all workforce questions that we ask: simply state the number of registered physicians without looking at the change in the population, and more importantly looking at the rate of patient attachment to primary care providers. This proves that this government does not understand the actual goal of getting primary care to Albertans, or they have no idea how to measure it.

So listen to the experts, not consulting contractors, and start collecting the right data. At the same time, implement incentives to attract doctors and other care providers where we need them. Build teams of providers so we need fewer physicians but actually have the specific providers that people need. When this is done it will reduce the paperwork for physicians and improve the quality of life.

Make sure staffing levels are appropriate and sustainable. Be sure that the full scope of practice is possible. We need to build access to obstetrics and surgical services in all of our rural areas. Make sure that the physicians and other team members are paid fairly, and these incentives will draw them there rather than prohibiting them from practising in our cities. Also, make sure that health care professionals are trained where we need them. They often stay where they're trained. Many of us are nervous when our children go away because we know they may not come back.

Focus on retention. There are many recommendations that have come forward from the various health professions themselves as to what the problems are and how they can be dealt with. Don't insult, belittle, and contribute to burnout. Listen to the solutions that are brought forward by the professions. Listen to the panels that you yourselves have put together to advise you. Physicians are burned out, yet this government believes they can work more in the private system after they finish their 50 to 80 hours a week in the public system.

Now, there is a perfect way to draw physicians away from underserved areas. That is our new private system, which will just bring more people into the cities. Wait-lists will grow in the public

system, and it will incentivize more doctors to work in urban areas.

1:00

But listen to experts. They will tell you all of these things that I've mentioned. Indeed, that's where I get them from, but be sure you don't keep this zombie legislation around. Let the restrictions on billing numbers die. Show you understand, and don't keep this around as a bullying tactic.

With that, I close debate.

The Speaker: That's a motion to close debate? Hon. member, did you just make a motion at the end of your speech?

Dr. Metz: Oh, do I? No.

The Speaker: To be clear, did you intend to make a motion at the end of your – I'm not telling you what to do. I'm asking you what you did.

Dr. Metz: I'm sorry. I did not intend to make a motion.

The Speaker: So then you did not, in other words? Yes?

Dr. Metz: Yes.

The Speaker: You agree that you did not make a motion? Okay, because if you've made one, we have to deal with it. So you're saying you never made one. Is that correct? [interjections]

Sorry, folks, let me do this because we've got to go home sometime tonight.

No motion was made?

Dr. Metz: No motion was made.

The Speaker: All right. I don't want it on the record that you made a motion and were disrespected.

Are there any other speakers on the Government Motion 15?

[Government Motion 15 carried]

The Speaker: The Justice minister.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I move to adjourn debate until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

The Speaker: You mean adjourn the House? Is that what you meant to say?

Mr. Amery: That, too. It is very late. [interjections]

The Speaker: Folks, order. You know what, let's just – what did you actually intend to say?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, it's very late tonight. I apologize. I move to adjourn the Assembly until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 1:03 a.m. on Tuesday]

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