



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, April 14, 2026

Day 45

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

Second Session

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

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Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Brar, Gurtej Singh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
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Party standings:

United Conservative: 47

New Democrat: 38

Progressive Tory: 1

Independent: 1

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Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 14, 2026

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and recognize a number of visitors that we have from Edmonton Classical Academy, a school in the beautiful riding of Edmonton-Gold Bar. I ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you teacher Hélène D'Astous from Holy Child school here with over 30 grade 6 students as part of the School at the Legislature. It's a multilingual school, so to them I say hello, bonjour, hola and welcome them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to all members of the Assembly I'd like to introduce students from grade 6 Windsor Park school in the riding of Edmonton-Riverview, which I have the honour to represent, along with their teacher Stacie Arends and some adult parent volunteers. Thank you. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce a group of our United Conservative constituency presidents. They're here from across the province today. Our CA presidents, of course, do amazing work day in and day out. For those in the gallery watching and in overflow I would like to invite them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly Jess Arsenault, my constituency manager, along with Ruven Rajoo, who serves as president for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. I ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly, but I don't see them here.

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

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly Megan Bishop, the executive director of the Book Publishers Association of Alberta, and members of the Alberta Partners for Arts and Culture as well as Jared Stein, the excellent constituency president for the Calgary-Peigan CA. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not quite sure if they're here yet. It's such a full gallery. Awesome to see. I would love to introduce from the international Canadian drag queens and friends Quinn Wade, who goes by Harold Schnitzel or Miss E. Magnolia, as well as Jody Schmidt-Bienert, Amin Cognito. They are here to show their support for the pride community and also to bear witness to Bill 25. Thank you so much. Please rise and receive the traditional welcome.

The Speaker: Calgary-Edgemont.

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am so pleased to rise and introduce to you and through you the incredible staff that keep the Calgary-Edgemont office running and support me, representing the riding with your compassion and all of your care. Fun fact: both of them joined me as social work practicum students, and they both loved the experience and are still here. Grateful for you, Jennifer Borggard and Miranda Christin. Please rise and receive the warm welcome.

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you entrepreneurs Navy Brar and Annie Manjuran, founders of Edmonton Fashion Week, Edmonton's premier fashion event, that has become a platform for local designers. I'm not sure where they are in the House, but please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Ms Lovely: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you and to all members of the Assembly Hetsree and Heli, who are students at the University of Alberta and here with us today to learn more about what happens in the Chamber.

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you a group that is here from the Alberta Funeral Service Association, including their president, Kirstie Smolyk, David Root, Dale Wright, Scott Green, and Will Martin. These folks work day in and day out for the betterment of their profession and supporting families through their most difficult times. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you I'd like to introduce Stephen Legault from Environmental Defence Canada. He's here today to learn all about the NDP energy policy. I understand my mayor is also in the gallery, who the Minister of Municipal Affairs will introduce later. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Calgary-Foothills.

Member Ellingson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Pleased to introduce to you and through you again some others, if they have arrived, from the International Drag Queens and Friends and Canadian Drag

Queens and Friends. Kevin Piercey, also known as Twistare, and Christopher Konoza, also known as Chris D. Bear, are here to raise awareness and support for the queer community. Please rise and receive the welcome.

The Speaker: Edmonton-West Henday.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you I have three amazing folks with the organization Dragging Youth, who may be through security right now. It's an all-ages inclusive space for youth to be themselves no matter how they identify. Kimberley Pizzey, Marilyn Gaa, and Lynne Wolfe are all here to bear witness to Bill 25 debate. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, it's with great pleasure I rise and introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Darryl Learie. Darryl is a constituent of mine, an advocate for people with disability, and a fighter for a more compassionate society. I ask Darryl to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Okay. Just before we do that, I'll just briefly remind everybody that some of the introductions didn't get done today because people went past their 20 seconds. So the ones that got cut off a little bit, I guess you know why. For future reference let's try to keep it within the clock.

Members' Statements

Alberta Disability Assistance Program

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, this government's decision to replace AISH with the Alberta disability assistance program, ADAP, has left thousands of Albertans with disabilities feeling afraid, stressed, and overwhelmed. These are people already living with immense daily challenges. They deserve stability, not uncertainty. Yet over 79,000 Albertans are being forced into a new system that will ask them to re-prove their disability, placing them under another brutalizing, stressful process. Under ADAP many will see their income drop by \$200 per month and \$400 for a couple at a time when people are struggling to afford the cost of rent and food. This cut will push them to the brink.

Mr. Speaker, my constituent Darryl Learie is one among many Albertans who will face such a cut. Darryl is here in the Speaker's gallery today. I'm proud to speak for Darryl and many others who could not make it to the gallery today. Darryl Learie led a paper petition with over 5,600 signatures alongside an online petition supported by more than 7,000 Albertans. I'll be tabling today these 5,600 signatures. These are signatures representing people who are scared, exhausted, and wondering how they survive. They feel invisible, they feel abandoned, and they are pleading simply to be heard. They are not alone.

Municipalities like Edmonton and Lethbridge and others have voiced their concerns, expressed compassion, and called on this government to cancel ADAP and truly listen. When I asked Darryl about his motivation, he responded, and I quote: I'm just fighting for a more compassionate society. End quote. I add my voice to those thousands of Albertans and ask this government to cancel ADAP because dignity is not optional and neither is our responsibility as members of this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Grande Prairie.

1:40

Cybercrime Prevention

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to address an issue that has shaken many people across our province: the alarming rise in technologically enabled extortion and digital fraud. Cybercriminals represent a serious and ongoing public risk by targeting families, seniors, and businesses across Alberta for financial exploitation, and these schemes are often conducted from across international borders, making them harder to investigate.

Since January 2025 Calgary police have reported 41 extortion attempts connected to a pattern of threats, intimidation, and financial coercion. Eighteen of these also involved shootings, where gunmen opened fire at homes, cars, or businesses with the goal of intimidating victims to coerce money from them. Many similar incidents have happened right here in Edmonton as well, in particular committed by the Bishnoi gang. We are horrified by the targeted violence against community members and small businesses across Alberta. These incidents have created deep fear in our communities. Business owners and newcomers who live in these communities are simply trying to have safe, stable lives across our province.

The government of Alberta's newly announced Cybercrime Task Force is a critical step towards addressing these threats. The Cybercrime Task Force will play a critical role in addressing fraud, identity theft, and extortion carried out using technology and will bring together experts in law, technology, consumer protection, and law enforcement to develop co-ordinated strategies that strengthen public safety and keep Albertans safe. This work is essential to restoring confidence and ensuring that every Albertan, regardless of background, is protected from digital exploitation.

Albertans deserve to feel safe in their communities. They deserve to know that when criminals attempt to intimidate or extort them, their government is working to protect them. We stand firmly with neighbours and communities to ensure that they can live and work without the threat of intimidation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

National Defence Investment in Alberta

Ms Goehring: Connecting with the military community here in Alberta has been one of the greatest joys in my position as both government and His Majesty's Loyal Opposition liaison to the Canadian Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs. Our military members and their families have all made great sacrifices to contribute to the values of peace, freedom, democracy, and human rights that we all experience in Canada today. At a time of great global instability the importance of these values is that much more apparent.

The impact the military community has on Alberta cannot be overstated. The impact on our economy: our military bases employ thousands of military members and civilians. The impact on community: our bases provide programming for military and civilian families. In an affordability crisis Albertans depend both on ongoing employment at our military facilities and on the community programming provided.

Our federal government has committed to increase defence spending, and Alberta is uniquely suited to assist in national defence operations. We should be embracing Alberta as the best place to invest this defence spending, but the UCP puts a chill on our reputation as defenders of this great country by refusing to denounce separatism and to stand up for Alberta's military community. The CAF would simply not operate in Alberta if we were to separate, and this government's refusal to put an end to the ongoing separatist rhetoric puts billions in military operation

funding at risk for our province. The CAF will prioritize investing in areas committed to Canadian sovereignty. When will this government commit to our collective Canadian sovereignty and support those who have so bravely protected and served us all?

Alberta's New Democrats will continue to support our economic future and the future of our military community in Alberta in collaboration with all areas of government and in unity with our fellow Canadians. To the military community: we see you, we thank you, and we stand with you.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-East.

Health Care System

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak in support of Alberta's publicly funded health care system and to recognize the front-line workers who sustain it every day. Across our province doctors, nurses, paramedics, health care aides, and support staff continue to serve Albertans under significant pressure. They work long hours, manage growing demand, and care for patients at some of the most difficult moments of their lives. Their dedication and professionalism are essential to the health and well-being of our communities, and they deserve our respect and continued support.

Emergency wait times remain a serious concern for many Albertans. Long waits create stress for patients and families and place added strain on staff. These pressures highlight the need to strengthen capacity, improve co-ordination, and ensure patients receive care in the most appropriate setting.

Surgical wait times are also a major challenge. Delayed surgeries affect quality of care, life, keep people away from work, and slow recovery. Improving access to timely surgeries is critical for patients and for the overall efficiency of our health care system.

Our government is taking action within a publicly funded system, focused on practical solutions that deliver real results for patients across communities large and small. Albertans should be comfortable knowing that the care they need is readily available and accessible in a timely manner. That principle remains firm while we continue working to make the system more responsive and sustainable for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, supporting front-line workers matters. Reducing emergency wait time matters. Improving access to surgery matters, and our government remains committed to a strong, publicly funded, patient-focused health care system for all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Alberta Separatism

Member Ceci: This separatist government is truly irresponsible. They are ready to risk our economic future to hold on to political power, and they'll change the rules of the game to make it happen. The members opposite aren't in this fight for Canada. They see the struggles with the federal government and are ready to give up. That's the most un-Albertan thing I can imagine. Albertans are strong, resilient, hard-working, and are ready to lean on each other when life gets hard. While the UCP pander to separatists, leaders across Alberta and Canada are raising alarm bells.

In a speech to Calgary Economic Development last week the mayor of Calgary warned that, quote, to choose independence would be to walk away from partnerships, investments, and jobs. End quote. The mayor reported that the rising rhetoric is damaging Calgary's ability to attract industry and that potential investors are telling him that they are putting their plans on hold for Calgary until this separatist rhetoric ends. If there is a referendum this fall, the

mayor wants Calgarians and Albertans to know where he stands, that's with a strong Calgary, in a strong Alberta, within an integral part of a strong Canada.

We've asked the members opposite to take the same stand time and again in this House and to sign a pledge to denounce separatism. Instead, the separatists are whispering that even if the courts block their push to divide Canada, they can count on the Premier to change the law again and to force through the referendum plot against our province. The mayor of Calgary has been clear. He stands for a united Canada. We know that the members opposite can't say the same thing.

On this side of the House we are for Alberta and for Canada. Thank you.

Government Policies and Women

Ms Hayter: Women in Alberta wake up carrying the weight of the UCP government's choices. They're the majority of the minimum wage earners and those barely making living wages, and it's usually the care work. The burden of costs this government downloads on to women is ridiculous.

Compacting the mental load of cost decisions throughout the day are the impacts that the UCP legislation has on her family. Gone are the days of women being able to happily scroll social media, smiling at the cats, and getting gardening ideas. They are now doomscrolling, learning how the UCP is making their lives more expensive.

The UCP needs to freeze the gas tax. They did it before the last election. Do Alberta women fill up today or hope it goes down tomorrow? A burden falls on women when she buys tampons. It's a need, just like toilet paper, so the UCP could require workplaces to provide both. Women across Canada have universal prescription contraception, but the UCP treat it like a luxury item. The emotional toll of hearing headlines on the news: Judge Orders Pause on Signature Validation Process for Alberta Independence Petition; the boundary commission minority report exposes a government desperate to stay in power, hopeless gerrymandering. Where in a woman's hectic day can she find the time to write a letter to the editor or her MLA while balancing family obligations?

The UCP has made calculated choices that cause rage and pain. Our daughters can't join a sports team without signing declarations stating they are female just to play sports. Our sons can't find jobs, but how does the UCP think \$13 an hour, the unfair youth minimum wage, will cover insurance, gas, let alone help them save for the future? We have to opt our children into sex ed. Why is the UCP making it difficult to access preventative education? Women go to bed stressing about paying the energy bill, because the UCP took the cap off, while they're also wondering: when will an election finally be called? Women are exhausted, and Albertans need to vote for a better government.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Provincial Fuel Tax

Mr. Nenshi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning the federal government announced gas tax relief of 10 cents a litre for the summer. But this government and the Premier consistently say that they'd rather have the money. The Premier has said \$7 per tank is no big deal for the average family; \$7 to the Premier and her government. If the government followed its own formula and fixed

the legislation, the average family would save over \$300 a year. Will the Premier follow the Prime Minister's lead and suspend the gas tax?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's a credibility issue here. When they were facing calls to reduce the fuel tax, they actually increased it. They put in a carbon tax, and they also told people to take the bus. We have sympathy for the cost of living for individuals and families. That's why we brought through the personal income tax cut, which is \$1,500 for a household. That saves five times the amount that a gas tax would. We gave it upfront. We're going to give it year after year after year. And we're going to continue monitoring the situation.

Mr. Nenshi: So I guess that's a no, then.

This Premier, of course, has talked about how the price of gas is not that high, how poor Albertans have overly generous benefits. That's the world she lives in. It's not the world average Albertans live in. This government wants to stick to a rigid formula that they could change right now. The high cost of gas doesn't just affect families. It affects businesses. From transportation to delivery to agriculture, businesses are carrying the load of this tax. The government could change that right now. Will the Premier do the right thing and reduce the gas tax?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, they increased personal income taxes, they increased corporate income taxes, they increased carbon taxes. On this side we took off . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. I could hear the question easily. I'd like to hear the answer, too, please.

Ms Smith: We took off a carbon tax and we advocated for the federal government to do the same. We also decreased corporate taxes and decreased personal income taxes so that Albertans have \$1,500 more in their pockets, five times the amount that they would save from the fuel taxes. As I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, we're going to continue monitoring it. We have a program in place so that if oil stays above \$90 for a quarter, then the tax will come off completely.

Mr. Nenshi: You know, when I was a teacher, Mr. Speaker, I hated it when students called on their own behaviour said, "But Johnny was worse," and that's all we ever hear from this Premier. She desperately wants to be the Leader of the Opposition instead of actually running the province. I hope Albertans give her her wish.

Mr. Speaker, the Legislature is in session. We can fix this now, not only if the price of gas is high . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. It works both ways. Let's hear the question and the answer.

Mr. Nenshi: We can fix this now, not only if the price of oil is high on 20 random days in June. Will the government change the legislation and fix it now?

Ms Smith: To be clear, Mr. Speaker, I'm not saying that Johnny was worse. I'm saying that the NDP was worse. That absolutely is the case, and everybody knows it.

What I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, is that because we have a permanent program, it will be enacted even when we're not in the Legislature. If we do have a quarter where the oil prices are above \$90 for a period of time, then as of July 1 that fuel tax will come off completely. We're going to continue to monitor the situation. We want to make sure that the program is enacted the way it was meant,

that if we have surplus and windfall revenues, a portion of those will be returned to taxpayers.

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

AI Data Centre Projects

Mr. Nenshi: The Premier had no problem changing legislation to help her friends the separatists, but she won't change legislation to help Albertans. But she will interfere on behalf of her friend Kevin O'Leary. She didn't answer any of my questions yesterday, so we're going to try this again. Every Albertan knows that there is no independent analysis left in this government, that everything comes from the Premier. But the Premier claims that it was an independent analysis that exempted her friend Kevin O'Leary from any environmental assessment for his phantom wonder valley project. Will the Premier share that independent assessment with the House today?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The wonder valley project was reviewed by an independent approvals officer, as is required by the law. That's what the law says. The review found that wonder valley is using standard, proven power and water systems that have been safely used in Alberta for decades and determined that an environmental impact assessment is not required in this case. The project still needs permits in order to proceed, and permits are not automatic. Wonder valley has to provide detailed technical assessments on the impacts to air, land, and water and show that they can do the project responsibly.

Mr. Nenshi: Simply, who was that independent officer and where is that so-called independent assessment? Again, this government has so much trouble with transparency. If they've got nothing to hide, just show us the analysis. In fact, let's show us the analysis on how many jobs are meant to be created by the government's obsession with these AI data centres. Are we really spending all of our economic development eggs in one basket, attracting businesses with no promised jobs? Isn't the whole point of economic development to create jobs? How many jobs are supposed to be created by wonder valley and other data centres?

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that the nonpartisan civil service has a job to do, and, no, we're not going to dox the person so that they can then criticize them online. There's a process that is in place, and it is required by law that they do the assessment. The permit process is going to continue, and I'm looking forward to seeing the outcome.

But nothing is automatic. When it comes to AI data centres, what we've put in place is a 2 per cent rack tax. We've also said that if they do end up connecting to the grid, they have to pay their portion of transmission costs. This could generate tens of millions of dollars worth of taxes not only to be able to pay for the things we care about but also to reduce electricity bills.

Mr. Nenshi: If the Premier is that worried, redact the civil servant's name and give us the analysis that proves anything of what she's saying, because what we know is that data centre jobs are notoriously precarious. They tend to be valuable but low-wage jobs like security guards and entry-level IT workers. In Ohio, in one example, they spent 4 and a half million dollars of taxpayer money to create – are you ready for it? – 10 jobs. The cost-benefit analysis is just not there. This is the opposite of good economic development policy. Why does the Premier love data centres so very much?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I mean, number one, we're not paying anything to attract data centres here. They're here because of the investment climate that we have. They're actually going to be paying us money because they're going to be paying taxes that we'll be able to use to fund Albertans' priorities, and they'll be reducing our power bills if they're connected to the power grid. I think tens of millions of dollars of additional revenue to pay for health care, education, other infrastructure is worth it. I don't know why the members opposite think otherwise.

The Speaker: There's lots of room to meet and talk privately in the back. Until then, let's just hear those that have the floor either for the question or the answer.

The next question belongs to the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Nenshi: But, of course, Mr. Speaker, exempting the Premier's friend from an environmental assessment that everyone else has to pay is a government subsidy, and the Premier should come clean on that. But the Premier doesn't like to come clean.

Premier's Travel to Saudi Arabia

Mr. Nenshi: We just got her first, very limited disclosure on her Saudi Arabian junket. She said in this House that she visited oil fields and, inexplicably, a Saudi air force base, maybe for the armed forces of the independent Alberta that she wants so badly. Her documents actually reveal that she visited UNESCO world heritage sites. Can the Premier just table her itinerary so we know what she did in Saudi Arabia?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know the reason they're opposed to AI data centres is that they're going to be fuelled by natural gas, and we already heard that they don't support natural gas. Just like their federal leader, they want to keep it in the ground.

When it comes to my international trip, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, yes. When we have people that we host here, that we want to see our major oil sites, we charter planes and we show them around.

I think the member opposite hasn't answered the question of why he thinks it was okay for him to accept trips when he was mayor. He accepted a fully paid trip from China, from the Rockefeller association, went to the World Economic Forum three times.

Mr. Nenshi: The Premier's facts are, of course, wrong. That's no surprise, but the point is that she got the wrong facts because we disclosed everything. The very first line . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. You know this is pretty interesting. I'd like to hear it.

Go ahead.

Mr. Nenshi: The very first line of the document the Premier is quoting says: in an effort to encourage transparency, we are disclosing everything. This government discloses nothing. The minister actually said that she needed a private jet because all she did was fly over those oil fields and she needed the big windows of a private jet. Seriously, he said that. How does any of this luxury travel benefit real Albertans?

2:00

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, no one likes a hypocrite, and that's why I think it is important to put on the record that the member

opposite accepted a five-day trip to China paid for by the World Economic Forum and the China centre for economic development, a branch of the Chinese government. He also attended the World Economic Forum in Davos three separate times – 2013, 2014, and 2016 – and he also attended a summit in Bellagio, Italy, paid for by the Rockefeller Foundation. [interjections]

The Speaker: All I can hear is Lethbridge-West. I'd like to hear the Premier, please.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, my trip was to understand a little bit more about Saudi Aramco to be able to see whether or not our service businesses could do business there.

Mr. Nenshi: But Johnny, but Johnny, but Johnny, Mr. Speaker. Why doesn't she look at her own activities? She could clear the air on this so easily. All she needs to do is disclose, the way that I always disclose. The only government that doesn't want to disclose is a government that has something to hide. What does this Premier have to hide? Why does she hate transparency so much? Why was one of those flights between Riyadh and Dubai, where 50 commercial flights fly a day? What do the Saudis expect in return, and when will she disclose it?

Ms Smith: Johnny is a little rattled, Mr. Speaker. I disclose all of my trips, and I've been very transparent about why we went to Saudi Arabia. There are dozens if not hundreds of businesses that want to do business there. Saudi Aramco is pursuing the same things we are: carbon capture, utilization, and storage; nature-based solutions; direct-air capture. I also wanted to understand a little bit more about how they might be looking at investment internationally, and we may be able to attract sovereign wealth investment in our province. We're going to continue to do these kinds of trips because they're good for Alberta. It attracts investment. [interjections]

The Speaker: Well, maybe we're getting it out of our system, maybe we're not. But now we only want to hear from the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Provincial Fuel Tax (continued)

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Families filling up their cars are being hit with some of the highest gas prices they've ever seen. When gas is \$1.70 a litre, it eats into every household budget, and driving to work or taking the kids to school or to activities isn't optional. So the provincial government should be responsive, right? They should move at the speed the gas companies do when they raise prices and give Albertans a break. Why won't the government do the easy, straightforward thing and reduce provincial fuel taxes right now to give Albertans relief at the pumps?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud that this government, in a nonreactive way, in a proactive way, legislated a fuel tax relief program that made sense for a jurisdiction like Alberta, where we take in more royalties at higher prices. The program is very defensible. It's not about making it easier for us to change it. It's about the defensibility of the program. Between the range of \$80 to \$90 in the preceding quarter: you could lose the entire tax; you could lose a portion of it. We think it's important we keep that. It works for our books. It works for Albertans.

Ms Pancholi: I'm glad the minister is proud of his program, but Albertans need relief at the gas pumps now. Most Albertans can't just absorb hundreds of dollars a month in higher gas prices. The

Minister of Finance says that families should wait until July and maybe, just maybe, there'll be some relief three months from now. Mr. Speaker, that's a pretty flippant response when Albertans need a break from prices that just keep going up, up, up. For families watching every dollar, relief at the pumps could not be more welcome, so why is the Premier so resistant to giving Albertans the relief they need?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, if you want a flippant response, here's one from 2016 from Premier Notley: "I think we all know that many of us are ourselves people that know who has the best gas prices, and when you go to fill up, you go to places with the best ones, and you see that there's a few extra cents. It's not just a question of having a more fuel-efficient vehicle, it could sometimes be a question of taking a bus, walking, you know, those kinds of things in terms of patterns of fuel use people engage in." That was when she was questioned about her carbon tax that she legitimized in this House, which in its latest iteration was 17 cents a litre.

Ms Pancholi: If the minister is so shocked about the cost of taxes on Albertans, he should be very shocked by the taxes that he's imposing on them right now, which he could provide relief from this minute. Suspending the provincial fuel tax would save Albertans 13 cents a litre, but maybe, look, for the Premier that's not very much. I mean, after all, she's used to being driven around in a taxpayer-funded vehicle, flying around in private jets paid for by her friend the Saudi prince, red carpet and gold cats in her office. Most Albertans aren't living the Premier's lifestyle. Most Albertans didn't get the pay raises the UCP did or living allowance increases. [interjections] Would it help if the separatists asked for it?

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. minister.

Thirty-five seconds is what we get, not more.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I'm also proud that this government is a low-tax jurisdiction by choice. The Premier mentioned personal taxes, corporate taxes, a fuel tax that is the second-lowest in the country. That's a choice. That's why we're creating all of the jobs in the entire country. That's why we're driving the economy of this country. People are moving here, voting with their feet to become part of the Alberta advantage. We don't need to act reactively; we believe in that. We believe that's the business case for Alberta going forward, and we're not going to change. We're going to keep welcoming people with an eye to the future.

The Speaker: Okay. The next question, and where we start no preamble on supplementaries, belongs to the Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Orphan Well Decommissioning

Ms Al-Guneid: Mr. Speaker, it is Groundhog Day; same story, same failure, and Albertans are the ones paying the price. Thousands of junk wells have been dumped again onto the Orphan Well Association, this time a record-breaking 4,000 wells in a single transfer. Overnight the total nearly doubled, and who's left holding the bag? Not the bankrupt companies that made the profits. Not the executives who walked away. It is Alberta families. It is taxpayers. Why does the UCP keep letting bankrupt companies walk away from their mess?

Mr. Jean: Well, I think, Mr. Speaker, that the answer is in the question. Bankrupt companies do walk away because they're not making money, and you know why they're not making money? The

NDP made life more expensive for everybody. They shut down coal. They brought in a carbon tax. They supported their Liberal and NDP buddies in Ottawa that just about shut down our entire industry. What are they talking about? All they do is lead the no-development party while we actually bring in . . .

An Hon. Member: All the jobs.

Mr. Jean: All the jobs, Mr. Speaker, and making sure our economy continues to grow.

Ms Al-Guneid: Wow, that was one fruit salad, Mr. Speaker. Given that companies have a clear legal obligation to clean up their mess – it is written into their contracts they sign with rural landowners; it is the polluter-pays principle – given that instead of enforcing that responsibility, the UCP is paving the way for taxpayers to pick up the tab through its so-called mature asset strategy, here is the question: how much public money has the Premier set aside to cover for these companies to enable her mature asset strategy scheme?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mature assets use something called a pipeline, and they use pipelines to transfer products. If we look at the MLA for Calgary-Glenmore's fact sheet, we'll see that in over 3,400 posts on X she's used more than 10,000 words and only used the word "pipeline" twice. In fact, on her Facebook page she's only ever typed the word "pipeline" four times, never in a positive light. She talks on one side about how Premier Notley put through a pipeline to the west coast: nothing but a fantasy. These folks don't care about the energy industry. They don't even care about the cleanup. They just care about politics. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Let's hear the question and, just for fun, let's hear the answer, too.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that the minister is obsessed with my social media while companies walk away from their legal obligations, while Alberta families are expected to pay every bill they owe, given that rural landowners were promised these wells would be cleaned up and given after everything we've heard today, it is clear: nothing has changed. It is the same excuses, the same failure. Groundhog Day, Mr. Speaker. The truth is this: the Premier's plan, shaped by her past as an R-star lobbyist, is using public money to clean up bankrupt companies' mess and pretend that's leadership.

The Speaker: I'm not certain I actually heard a question there, but the minister can respond if he chooses to.

Mr. Jean: I didn't hear a question either, Mr. Speaker, but I would like to talk to her a little bit about her party leader and what her party leader has recently said. "Carney's deal with [the Leader of the Opposition] is the sellout of the century, scrapping climate legislation for a pipeline that will never be built." That's what Avi Lewis says. He doesn't believe in pipelines. Although a vast majority of Canadians like this MOU, like the fact that we get pipeline and energy infrastructure, the NDP continue to do what they do best: talk about no development and making sure it never happens.

2:10

Cybercrime Prevention

Ms Lovely: Mr. Speaker, over the past year Albertans in both Calgary and Edmonton . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. I couldn't hear any of that.

Start over again, Camrose. I think you're only two seconds into it.

But let's all hear it this time.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past year Albertans in both Calgary and Edmonton have witnessed a deeply troubled pattern of extortion involving online threats, acts of intimidation, escalating to gunfire at homes and businesses. Law enforcement in Calgary and Edmonton have received dozens and dozens of reported extortion attempts directed at South Asian residents. These crimes are sophisticated, often co-ordinated across borders, and designed to silence victims through fear. Can the Minister of Justice tell the House what the government is doing to address this deeply troubling issue of extortion?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Of course, we take these extortion and intimidation threats extremely seriously. Albertans must feel safe in their homes, in their neighbourhoods, and in their communities. That's why we're strengthening Alberta's response through the Cybercrime Task Force. We've put together a task force that consists of experts in law, in technology, consumer protection, and law enforcement to help us work on this important issue. These crimes are sophisticated. They're often happening across borders. Our response must match that complexity. Through this task force we're sending a clear message.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for his work on this file. Given that many extortion threats are delivered through encrypted digital platforms and international communications specifically designed to conceal offenders and intimidate victims and given that the fear of retaliation can prevent individuals and business owners from coming forward, to the Minister of Justice: how will the Cybercrime Task Force strengthen investigative capacity while ensuring victims feel safe and supported to report these crimes?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, one of the key priorities of this task force is ensuring that victims feel safe and supported when they come and report these crimes. The fear of retaliation is absolutely real, but it should never prevent anyone from reporting a crime. This task force strengthens the investigative capacity of law enforcement along with the support of experts who will be providing input and information to help assist with policing strategies. The recommendations from the task force will help to shape our future policies so that we can combat this major issue head-on.

The Speaker: Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the minister for making this a priority. Given that extortion activity in both Calgary and Edmonton has had a ripple effect well beyond individual victims, creating fear across entire cultural and business communities and given that restoring public confidence requires visible enforcement and strong co-ordination to disrupt these heinous crimes, to the same minister: how will the task force help to rebuild community trust and demonstrate that Alberta will not tolerate technology-enabled intimidation or violence?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Amery: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. We certainly understand the broader impact that these crimes are having on families, on businesses, and on entire communities. That's why we're restoring confidence through visible action and strong co-ordination with law enforcement. It's why the task force includes members from the South Asian community, who have been disproportionately targeted by extortion and intimidation. It's also why the South Asian community has been pivotal in shaping the work of this Cybercrime Task Force. We're working very closely with all communities impacted, and we'll have a very appropriate response shortly.

AI Data Centre Projects

(continued)

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, Kevin O'Leary's wonder valley project would be "the world's largest AI data center industrial park." A project that massive would use four times as much water annually as the lifetime usage of the entire city of Red Deer, even though the municipality in which it's being built declared an emergency due to drought conditions. But somehow Kevin O'Leary doesn't have to pass a standard environmental impact assessment. No other data centre gets this exemption. Will the government explain why they have one set of rules for Albertans and a different set for the Premier's close friends?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of the environment.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. The reality is that when there's an environmental impact assessment done, it's done under strict rules under EPEA. EPEA has been around for 33 years, and those strict rules will continue to be applied by our government. The reality is that when it comes to AI data centres, 33 years ago they didn't have AI data centres. I don't think they even had Internet back then. We apply those rules based upon what EPEA provides us with, and that's what was done in this situation.

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, given that the minister has yet to present a clear plan on how he intends to mitigate the environmental impact of data centres writ large and given that there aren't any forthcoming regulations that would give data centre proponents clarity or certainty and further given that the minister seems to believe that technology alone will take the place of good oversight and that closed-loop cooling systems will solve all the water usage concerns, let's start there. Will the minister require that all proposed data centres operate on a closed-loop system?

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, it's clear that the members opposite are just trying to fearmonger about data centres, and they clearly don't want to see us grow and diversify our economy. Over here what we're focused on is providing clear, fair, balanced rules, and everyone has to follow the same rules. No one cuts any corners. We know that modern technology has transformed the way in which data centres are cooled. You can absolutely cool the data centre without requiring large quantities of water. We're working closely with all the project proponents through our data centre concierge service to make sure the best technology is used in Alberta.

Mr. Ip: Given that a growing number of data centre projects in the U.S. are on pause because communities are calling for further studies about their long-term impacts and given that this minister has offered no details on what kinds of safeguards will be in place

to ensure the public interest of Albertans is protected and further given that the O'Leary exemption of this government could be a harbinger of things to come, how can Albertans trust that this government won't just sell Albertans down the river, all for a day pass to Mar-a-Lago?

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, as my colleague earlier mentioned, the environmental impact assessment is for new, novel technologies that have an unknown impact and require further study. What we know about the wonder valley project is that it is standard technology that is well known and understood, and as such the environmental impact assessment is not applicable. I want to assure all Albertans that all of the rest of our rules and regulations and approvals that are required for any industrial project will still apply to the wonder valley project and every other data centre project and that there will be no exceptions to that.

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

Access to Diagnostic Health Services

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This UCP government is inflicting the worst of American health care on Albertans through unlimited access to unnecessary diagnostics. Expected waits for non-urgent CT scans have doubled since this Premier took office. Lack of technologists already assures this will worsen. Unnecessary scans will make wait-lists longer. Will the minister reveal what the UCP's private-pay, self-order diagnostic scheme will cost our public health care system, and why would they allow unmeasured harm to delay diagnosis?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know what's going to help health care in Alberta? Having more doctors, more nurses, more LPNs, et cetera. In 2019 we had 10,600 doctors. We're now at 13,848. That's 101 just since January 1. And we've seen another 90 more nurses to a record 49,570. We have more nurse practitioners, an additional 30 nurse practitioners, to 1,167 from 589 just . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Metz: Thank you. Given that last month the minister considered it fearmongering when asked about the risks of self-ordered diagnostics and continues to answer every question by giving us the number of doctors there are and given that she said she would look at Japan and South Korea for guidance, where longer public wait times, test overuse, cost escalation, fragmented follow-up, and additional referrals and tests are common when this system is brought in, will the minister explain to Albertans what analysis she has completed of self-referred diagnostics, or is this a smokescreen to cover up more bloated contracts?

2:20

The Speaker: The minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure what the member opposite is accusing our lab techs and our doctors of doing in terms of contracts, et cetera. What I can tell you is that we entrust Albertans to be able to look after their own health care. They have the opportunity through self-referral to be able to access tests that currently they do not access. They are able to, once legislation is passed and we put the regs in place, take control.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:20.

Dr. Metz: Given that diagnostic imaging reports require clinical correlation because they must be interpreted by a trained clinician aware of the individual's history and status and given that for-profit diagnostic marketing scams are known to prey on worried patients, driving them to unnecessary tests, and given that the public system will end up paying for further follow-up assessments and tests, how does the minister justify this waste of public funding that feeds these scams rather than fixing our public health care system?

The Speaker: The minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure why the members opposite continue to fearmonger and create uncertainty for the general public who want to take control of their health care. Right now there are long delays in getting health care at times because of access issues. We are going to improve access issues, and the market is going to adjust to that. We're going to make sure that people have the ability to take care of their own health care and have tests that they need. We already have increased screening in . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Hospital Workplace Safety

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, hospitals across Alberta are caring for a growing population, and emergency departments in particular are managing high patient volumes and complex situations. Health care workers have raised concerns about safety in hospital environments, and recent incidents have underscored how challenging these settings can be for staff, patients, and families alike. To the minister of hospitals and surgical health: what is our government doing to strengthen hospital safety and security so health care workers can continue providing care in safe and supportive environments in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Harassment and violence have absolutely no place in our hospitals, and no patient or staff member should ever feel unsafe while they're working providing care to Albertans. I also want to thank all our first responders and everyone who acted really quickly in that situation that currently arose and in other situations that do arise that put people at risk. Our government is taking concrete actions to strengthen hospital safety. We increased the protective services budget from \$119 million to \$130 million, and we are . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that these incidents are sometimes underreported because workers are unsure whether reporting will lead to follow-up and given that a strong culture of reporting is essential to maintaining safe and respectful workplaces, can the minister please tell the Assembly what steps our government is taking to encourage reporting and ensure concerns raised by front-line health care workers are taken seriously and addressed across Alberta hospitals?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We strongly encourage all health care workers who experience harassment or violence to report these incidents through My Safety Net. It's the province-wide health and safety reporting system. Also, reporting

ensures incidents are properly addressed, helps identify corrective actions, and allows the system to track trends and strengthen supports that are most needed. Health care employees may also raise concerns through the whistle-blower program and either through the designated officers or directly to Alberta's independent Public Interest Commissioner. Let me be clear. Harassment and abuse are unacceptable.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker and Minister. Given that workplace safety in health care is closely linked to broader systems pressures such as patient volume, staffing levels, and facility capacity and further given that supporting front-line workers is key to retaining skilled professionals and maintaining high-quality health care, can the minister please provide an update on how our government is addressing these broader system challenges to support safer workplaces and a sustainable health care workforce across hospitals, emergency departments, and community care settings?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to. At the Royal Alex alone we are investing an additional \$61 million over three years to support emergency department diversion programs, improve triage and patient flow, and reduce alternative level of care stays. Additionally, \$91 million through Acute Care Alberta and Alberta Health Services will expand treatment space and virtual care pathways. Besides that, Alberta now has a record number of 13,848 physicians practising, roughly 20 per cent more than in 2019, when the members opposite were in office.

Alberta Separatism and First Nation Treaty Rights

Member Arcand-Paul: Mr. Speaker, last week First Nations stood up to the UCP's separatist agenda, and Court of King's Bench Justice Leonard told the Premier that she could not allow a separatist question to move forward until the court case with First Nations has a decision from a judge. My question is simple. Will the Premier honour what Justice Leonard has ordered?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we always honour and respect the decision of the courts. We are working closely with the department officials to review that decision. We know that it's a temporary decision, that a final decision has not been issued. The matter is before the courts. It would be highly inappropriate to comment on it any further.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Just try not to jump right into what's actually in front of the courts. Go ahead, hon. member.

Member Arcand-Paul: Given that I'm not asking about the UCP's position on that court case because we all know what it is and further given that the UCP has shown such contempt for courts in this province, will the Premier do the right thing and finally tell her separatist supporters what her own legislation says? Their question was dead on arrival.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, the Premier and this government have been absolutely clear about what our position is. Once again, that position is that we want a strong Alberta within a united Canada. That means an Alberta where its jurisdiction is respected, a Canada

where that jurisdiction is respected, each of those two levels of government staying within their lanes and neither of them encroaching on the other. That is a pretty clear statement. I don't know how to articulate for the member or any of the NDP any further. Our position is clear, but we will not comment on the decision before the court.

Member Arcand-Paul: Given that that articulation would be helpful for the Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation, the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, the Mikisew Cree First Nation, and the Blackfoot Confederacy, who have all had to fight this government's separatist agenda, will the Premier commit today to repaying the legal fees spent by these nations, and will she apologize to them and all Albertans and Canadians for wasting their time with her made-up sovereignty or this strong Alberta and threatening Canadian unity in so doing?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, the only people talking about separation or bringing it up in this Chamber are members of the NDP. The fact of the matter is that we have a matter that is an active, live issue before the courts. The hon. member is a lawyer. He knows full well that commenting on active matters within the courts is highly inappropriate, and the posturing and the theatrics are not something that we're going to entertain on this side of the House. We're going to let the court case play out. We're going to let the parties receive an ultimate and final decision, and we're going to go from there.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Provincial Firearms Policies

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill C-21 is a sweeping and reckless federal law that creates criminals where none existed without improving public safety. This bill requires the surrender or disposal of firearms newly classified as prohibited through unilateral decisions by the federal government, with an amnesty set to expire on October 30. Can the Minister of Justice explain to this Assembly what steps our government is taking to have the federal amnesty extended or otherwise protect Albertans from being arbitrarily criminalized under this misguided federal legislation?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for her advocacy. From the moment that the federal government announced its gun confiscation scheme, we've been unequivocally clear. Alberta is not going to support measures that will target law-abiding, honest firearm owners in this province. This so-called gun grab does absolutely nothing for public safety. It's why our government brought a motion within this Assembly under the Alberta Sovereignty Within a United Canada Act affirming that Alberta will always stand behind its law-abiding gun owners.

Ms de Jonge: Given that Bill C-21 is the result of misguided federal policy and Albertans expect clarity, not confusion, about how they will be treated by their own justice system, can the minister plainly explain what Alberta's prosecution policy is with respect to offences that arise solely from Bill C-21? Specifically, have Crown prosecutors been directed not to lay or proceed with charges under this federal gun ban? And what certainty, if any, does that provide to gun owners in constituencies like mine in Chestermere-Strathmore?

2:30

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Amery: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Through the Alberta Sovereignty Within a United Canada Act we've provided guidance to the Alberta Crown prosecution service that home defence matters. Where all homeowners are acting reasonably and where it's not in the public interest to prosecute we expect that they do not prosecute. The same goes for firearms-related offences targeting law-abiding gun owners. These are low-priority issues, and we do not support targeting those law-abiding gun owners. We're looking forward to the appeal at the Supreme Court of Canada and the results that come out of that as well.

The Speaker: Chestermere-Strathmore.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Minister of Justice has stated that Alberta will not enforce the federal gun ban and that police have been or will be directed to treat this federal program as a nonpriority, can the minister explain what specific direction has been given to police services in Alberta regarding the enforcement of offences arising from Bill C-21? In particular, are police being instructed not to investigate, not to lay charges, or simply not to prioritize these offences, and how consistent is that direction across municipal police services and the RCMP in Alberta?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, like the guidance that we've provided to the Alberta Crown prosecution service, the minister of public safety has also written to law enforcement indicating that targeting law-abiding gun owners is a low provincial policing priority. Ineffective and expensive gun buyback policies do not reduce gun crime in this province. Targeting law-abiding gun owners does not reduce crime, and criminals are not stopping off to register their guns before they go and commit those crimes. We'll continue to use every single lawful tool that we have, but here's this. We will always stand behind law-abiding gun owners on this side of the Assembly.

Alberta Disability Assistance Program

Ms Renaud: In July the UCP government will transfer 80,000 AISH recipients who have already been assessed as severely disabled into a new program. This government says that they created ADAP to help disabled Albertans by allowing them to work and to earn more, Mr. Speaker, but that's not true. Disabled Albertans already have the ability to work on AISH, and in fact they could earn more on AISH than they will on this new program, ADAP, about \$500 more. They will also have a \$200 cut. This government continues to hide the new criteria they'll use to decide employability. When will this government start telling the truth?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I think the real question is: when will the NDP start telling the truth? It's disappointing to continue to see the Official Opposition rise in this place and call for the end of ADAP, ignoring thousands of people who could not receive disability supports underneath that member's government when she was on this side of the House. We committed to Albertans that we would bring in two disability programs, to care for Albertans that can work and to care for Albertans who can't work with disabilities, and on July 1 we'll fulfill that promise to the people of Alberta.

Ms Renaud: Given that the minister says that they're investing hundreds of millions in employment services to help former AISH recipients find work – that's also not true; only a fraction of that is new spending – and given that we know it's for things like resumé writing, virtual workplace training without any improvements

whatsoever to accessibility, given that we heard in estimates there are 60-plus new disability contractors and given this government's own procurement issues, will this UCP government commit to publishing the names of all of the contractors and what their employment targets are?

The Speaker: The minister. [interjections] Order. I was calling on the minister and no one else.

Go ahead.

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, I mean, this government is investing \$254 million in employment supports. That is three times what the NDP government did when they were in power. Underneath the leadership of this Premier we've increased disability supports by \$1 billion. That's an increase of 41 per cent. We're not going to be lectured by the NDP, who clearly do not want this investment to take place. They voted against a quarter billion dollars in employment supports. That's shocking. Again, we're going to fulfill our commitment to Albertans on July 1 despite what the NDP say.

Ms Renaud: Given that this reckless government's consultations are an insult to the disability community in terms of scope and reliability and given that experts, advocates, families, the disability community have all urged this government to immediately pause this poorly thought out destruction of AISH and we know that Lethbridge, Edmonton, Claresholm, Camrose, and Calgary are debating it today – they have all sent letters to this government urging them to immediately pause and consult ADAP because they know the harm that's coming – who are you listening to? It's not Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member will direct comments through the chair.

Go ahead, Minister.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I'm listening to the Canadian Institute for the Blind, as an example, who stood with me just two weeks ago here in Edmonton to announce the employment support programs that they support. I'm standing with the hundreds of people who have contacted me who do not receive supports for disabilities but want to work and receive support for their disabilities. Most importantly, I'm standing with those who were on AISH underneath the NDP rule who were told they could not work. In fact, that member and her former government punished them for participating in the workforce. We reject that, and on July 1 we're going to fix it for the people of Alberta.

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

Bill 28

Member Miyashiro: Mr. Speaker, "conservative" used to mean limited government, but with Bill 28 the UCP government is throwing that out the window and choosing a path of unprecedented meddling into municipal government by taking away responsibilities and possible revenue sources. The wannabe mayor of Alberta thinks he knows better than locally elected councils and is turning Alberta into a nanny state, which, by the way, no one in municipal government asked for. Did the minister or mayor of Alberta consult with anyone for this nanny state bill, or was it the result of some fever dream?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:36. That's two within a minute. Nice work, folks.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We worked extensively with a number of municipalities and with associations. Hence, why we had RMA supporting along with Alberta Munis the work that we did around the councillor accountability framework, the work that we did around natural person powers, the work that we did surrounding work on councillor requests for councils to make sure that administration isn't burdened. We work closely with municipalities. We don't have the same role as municipalities. Municipalities are creatures of the province. We need to work with them, overseeing to make sure they deliver core services. That is our job, and we want municipalities to do theirs.

Member Miyashiro: Given that Bill 28 might simultaneously cause property taxes to rise while reducing offside levies and allow private charter schools access to municipal reserve land and given that this government has empowered itself to take over municipal utilities, another source of revenues for municipalities, whenever it desires to do so, given that the mayor of Alberta has granted himself the power over municipal land use, what is the endgame for this government in its quest for power and control?

Mr. Williams: The endgame is schools being built in our communities with reserve land for charter schools as well as public and separate. The endgame, Mr. Speaker, is water delivered in the city of Calgary. If they're not getting water, what's the point of all the extra woke and extra money spent and the hundreds of millions of dollars that didn't go towards the water system? Of course, we need to have this authority. Anyone who thinks that the city of Calgary doesn't need oversight when it comes to the water hasn't lived in Calgary or paid attention to the news over the last two years.

Member Miyashiro: Well, well, well. Given that Bill 28 creates library inspectors whose job will be to inspect any matter related to management, operation, and boards of a public library and given that these inspectors will have access to everything, including all of your library accounts, and given that there are new rules for censorship despite every public library in Alberta already separating collections by age appropriateness, will the ministers explain how this nanny state politicization of public libraries is acceptable when they won't even let . . .

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. When you get to 35 seconds, you've got to shut 'er down.

Mr. Williams: The member has got to shut 'er down.

There it is, Mr. Speaker, buried in the 14th question of our day and the second of the Legislature coming back, the third question, the attempt to defend children having access to pornography publicly funded through our libraries. It is despicable. This government will always defend the rights of parents to make decisions for their children. Members opposite: I don't know how they come up with this or what polling they're looking at, but saying that seven-year-olds should have access to pornographic material at the government's expense is outrageous, inappropriate, and why you should always vote United Conservative in every election that comes.

The Speaker: A point of order was noted at 2:39.

2:40 Health Services in Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, from Fort McMurray to Medicine Hat rural communities face unique health care challenges according to the health services community profiles from 2025. Fort McMurray, like other rural communities, had people forced to go to the big cities to

access health care. In that reporting year alone 5,600 visits were out of Fort McMurray proper. Most people are travelling that 450 kilometres to the Royal Alex. To the government: what is the awareness of the bureaucracy and the significant challenges that rural and remote communities like Fort McMurray face in accessing health care?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. He is correct. Over the past five years roughly 1,000 to 1,200 patients each year have had to leave the Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo region to access acute-care services. We know we need to do more to ensure patients receive care closer to home. That's why we're developing a 50-year long-term capital plan and a 30-year provincial workforce strategy for the acute-care system to guide strategic investment in infrastructure and workforce growth where demand is greatest across Alberta. We know it is great in Fort McMurray.

The Speaker: A point of order was noted back at 2:40.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer. It's given that Fort McMurray's birth rate is 26 per 1,000 women and infant mortality rate being 6 per 1,000 births, both higher than the provincial average. It's given that the Northern Lights regional health centre lacks substantial maternal, pediatric, and neonatal services. Given that internal neonatal transfers separate families, delay continuity of care, and increase clinical risk for newborns, to the same minister: what measures are being taken to address the growing demand for these services in northern Alberta?

The Speaker: The minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is currently developing a province-wide neonatal intensive care strategy as well to ensure Albertans have the capacity needed to care for our most vulnerable infants, including roughly 35 to 40 newborns from the Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo region who are transferred to Edmonton to receive specialized neonatal care. This strategy will help guide future planning and investments, strengthening neonatal services across the province and ensuring families have access to high-quality care when and where they need it most. We celebrate the fact that we are a young province having many children.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's given that it's very expensive to build these specialized health facilities. The Grande Prairie hospital cost almost \$1 billion. The Red Deer hospital expansion almost hit the \$2 billion mark. Further given that Fort McMurray's Northern Lights regional health centre has an entire fourth floor that is empty due to the opening of the Willow Square long-term care facility, which freed up a lot of bed blockers, to the same minister. The fourth floor of our regional health centre has thousands of square feet of space ready to be developed. What is the government's plan for this hospital?

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Northern Lights regional health centre currently does have shelled space on the fourth floor. It could support maternal care, neonatal, pediatric services, and future clinical expansion. We're carefully assessing how this space can be best utilized to meet the needs of the Fort

McMurray-Wood Buffalo region through the development of a detailed business plan. We're spending \$1 million currently in capital maintenance and renewal to help that plan move forward as well as \$5.1 million for future projects.

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills I am pleased to present the committee's final report on Bill Pr. 1, The Ranchmen's Club Ordinance Amendment Act, 2026, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, and Bill Pr. 2, Prairie Bible Institute Amendment Act, 2026, sponsored by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. These bills were referred to the committee on March 26, 2026. The report recommends that both Bill Pr. 1 and Bill Pr. 2 proceed. I request concurrence of the Assembly in the final report of bills Pr. 1 and Pr. 2.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, the chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills, has requested concurrence in the report of the committee on Bill Pr. 1, The Ranchmen's Club Ordinance Amendment Act, 2026, and Bill Pr. 2, Prairie Bible Institute Amendment Act, 2026.

[Motion for concurrence carried]

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table a petition of Albertans that has gathered over 5,600 signatures. These are Albertans asking the government to stop the proposed transition of AISH recipients into ADAP and asking the government to consult with the impacted Albertans on this transition. I ask the government to listen again and take seriously the over 5,600 Albertans that put signatures on this petition.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Minerals.

Bill 30 Expedited 120-Day Approvals Act

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 30, Expedited 120-Day Approvals Act.

Major projects are on the horizon that will support Alberta in reaching its goals of doubling oil and gas production by 2035 and increasing market access. This legislation would send a strong positive signal to industry that Alberta's government is committed to getting these important projects built.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I hereby move first reading of Bill 30, Expedited 120-Day Approvals Act, 2026.

[Motion carried; Bill 30 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a letter on behalf of the Parkinson Association of Alberta. They are a fantastic organization based in my constituency. Within this letter they are just outlining their organization's perspective on Bill 18, Safeguards for Last Resort Termination of Life Act.

The Speaker: Edmonton-McClung.

Member Irwin: I should be able to read the . . .

The Speaker: Okay. You did, I think.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the five requisite copies of a *Globe and Mail* article written earlier this month titled Alberta Will Rid Ideology from Schools Just as Soon as It Stops Dogs from Barking.

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

Member Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the five requisite copies of a letter from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business to the hon. Minister Horner. [interjection] Oh, sorry.

Mr. Shepherd: No names.

Member Ellingson: Minister of Finance. Apologies.

Entitled "Small businesses are being squeezed by fuel prices – Sustained oil prices demand immediate relief."

The Speaker: Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have copies of more than a thousand postsecondary students and faculty who signed a petition to the Legislative Assembly to rescind the Back to School Act.

The Speaker: Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two items I'm tabling. The first is a notice of motion that's being dealt with at the executive council of Calgary today. It's called "Agent of Change Policy Framework for Music, Arts, and [Culture]." The second is another notice of motion being dealt with at the executive council called: building Calgary's creative future; a long-term strategy for arts, music, and culture.

The Speaker: Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of an environmental scan called Self-referred Private-pay Diagnostic Imaging and Screening Laboratory Services that was put out one month ago by the Alberta Medical Association.

The Speaker: Are there any more tablings? Seeing none.

I in fact have a tabling today. I would like to table five copies of the USB thumb drives containing the electoral division boundaries, the digital shape forms referenced in the '25-2026 Electoral Boundaries Commission final report tabled on March 26, 2026, along with the attached memo. For those keeping score, this is being tabled separately because we received the two pieces of information separately, so now it's all tabled.

2:50

That brings us to points of order. The first one of several was made at 2:20 p.m. I believe by the Deputy Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Oh, okay. Sorry. I was looking at the other deputy. I apologize.

Mr. Shepherd: Absolutely. Yes, it was called by my colleague.

At that time the Minister of Primary and Preventative Health Services was responding to the Member for Calgary-Varsity, and in her response to the member said something to the effect of: I don't know what the member is accusing lab techs and doctors of doing. Words to that effect. Now, to be clear, under 23(h), (i), (j), making allegations against another member, you yourself have said, Mr. Speaker, that we do not, as members, have the right to say what another member is thinking or put words in their mouth or ascribe intentions to them. The Member for Calgary-Varsity had asked about government contracts and concerns with those contracts. The minister chose to use that to make allegations about the Member for Calgary-Varsity making accusations of doctors and lab techs. I think that is a clear point of order.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I disagree. I don't believe this is a point of order. My unofficial record suggests that the minister said: I'm not sure what the member is accusing our lab techs and our doctors of doing in terms of contracts, et cetera. That is clearly a matter of debate. The member has self-admittedly said: I'm not sure what the member is accusing anyone of doing.

What I can say is that the member may have an issue with the way that this has been posed as a response, but if the member is looking for a proper response, maybe the member might do well by asking a proper question instead of just throwing mud at the government and casting aspersions on the hon. minister, who's doing a fantastic job as part of Alberta's health care refocusing.

Not a point of order in my opinion, Mr. Speaker, but of course it's just my opinion. I leave it in your very capable hands.

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you. The question was, "Is this a smokescreen to cover up more bloated contracts?" and the minister of health said, "Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what the member opposite is accusing our lab techs and doctors of doing in terms of contracts, et cetera." Actually, the minister pretty much said that the member is accusing our lab techs. They didn't actually speak to what was on their mind.

I will say that while this is a matter of debate, it's not a helpful matter of debate, I will note to the minister, and perhaps you could debate differently in the future. While it is not quite a point of order, it's certainly not a helpful way to express oneself in this Chamber.

The next point of order was made on or around 2:36 p.m. Okay. The hon. Deputy Opposition House Leader is on his feet, so I'm going to say you did that.

Mr. Shepherd: Sorry. Was that yours, or was that ours? I had one around that time.

Mr. Schow: You called one and he called one. I think I called one first.

The Speaker: At 2:36 I think it was probably the opposition, but somebody's got to own it.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, I did call a point of order at about that time, again under 23(h), (i), and (j), making allegations against another member, imputing false or unavowed motives, using abusive or insulting language of a manner likely to cause disorder. At that time there was a response from the Minister for Assisted Living and Social Services against the Member for St. Albert, and he used language to the effect of, "That member and her caucus are punishing people with disabilities," or something to that effect.

Now, Mr. Speaker, you yourself recently ruled that referring to a member and attaching them to a collective – you were speaking in that case about the Premier, speaking of the "separatist Premier" or "Premier and separatist caucus" or "separatist Premier and UCP government" – was in fact a point of order. What we have here is the minister attempting to get away with what he cannot by attaching the Member for St. Albert to our caucus.

Indeed, the government has argued at length that saying things like "punching down" or language like that, sort of using it towards Albertans, is inappropriate, and I believe that has been supported by the chair. In this case, Mr. Speaker, I would argue that suggesting that the Member for St. Albert, whether or not he wishes to attach her to our caucus as a whole, is in fact looking to punish or actively punishing Albertans with a disability would be wildly inappropriate language, and I would say that it's a point of order.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I disagree. Not a point of order. In many instances in this Chamber the members opposite have accused the government of being a separatist government, and that has been ruled in order. I believe that you've ruled it as such recently, which is why I've begun to refer to the members opposite as the socialist opposition. What I can say is that in this instance I believe the hon. member did not make any direct allegations about the member. In addition, the members are presupposing what the Member for St. Albert believes or thinks, which has been ruled out of order in the past.

What is being suggested here is a matter of debate. That's what we're here to do. I leave that in your hands, Mr. Speaker. I don't believe it's a point of order.

The Speaker: Well, interesting debate. I appreciate all of it. Here's what I have that the Blues say for everybody's information. "In fact, that member and her former government punished them for participating in the workforce. We reject that, and on July 1 we're going to fix it for the people of Alberta."

Let me say this. The hon. Deputy Opposition House Leader is not wrong that at some point the phrase "punching down" was deemed a point of order, but I think he might even agree with me that it was deemed a point of order after being used repeatedly. This is a very similar case. For today it's a matter of debate, but should the government side continue to make the allegation of punishing them for working, then it will become a point of order also. While it's not a point of order – it's a matter of debate – if the government side continues with that phraseology on a number of bases, it will certainly become a point of order. I'm hoping we don't have to go there.

The next point of order – now it gets fun, because I think there were two called in the same minute at 2:36 – by the government side. Yes, the government side called it.

Point of Order Referring to Proper Titles

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is where we had some confusion with the previous point of order and the timing.

I called the point of order at the time the Member for Lethbridge-West was speaking and in both the initial question and the first supplemental referred to the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs as the mayor of Alberta. Changing titles has consistently been ruled out of order in this Chamber, dating back, as far as my memory would go as a member, to when the hon. Minister Tyler Shandro was the health minister and using his name or various titles as opposed to using the respectful title of minister of health at the time. This has been ruled a point of order in the past, and I would hope that you'd rule it a point of order today. Not the mayor of Alberta; the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

The Speaker: The Deputy Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would disagree. I don't think this is a point of order. I would say that it's a matter of debate. I have the member's question here in front of me. In the first question he did in fact refer to the minister as minister. In the final question of the first question he said: "Did the minister [slash] mayor of Alberta consult with anyone for this nanny state bill, or was it the result of [a] fever dream?"

Now, we have heard the Premier refer to the Leader of the Opposition as the professor. I have heard the Government House Leader do so on multiple occasions in this House, whether through heckling or, I believe, even perhaps once or twice while on his feet speaking officially on the record in this House. So I think, Mr. Speaker, if I may, there is room for a certain amount of artistic licence. The member did refer to the minister as minister. I think also that using a colourful term, I think, to in gest bring a bit of humour into the House is a legitimate form of debate, so I disagree that this is a point of order.

Thank you.

3:00

The Speaker: You have something new, I trust, and short, I trust.

Mr. Williams: Yes, very short.

The Speaker: Make it short. Make it new. Please.

Mr. Williams: Oh, yes. Very happy to, Mr. Speaker. However you rule on this, I just want to add that, at risk of making sure I don't offend all the mayors, I would not be offended if I had that title. "Your worship" is the coolest name in show business and politics. Just want to make sure that all the mayors out there know it.

The Speaker: It was short. I'm not sure it was helpful, but it was short, so I'll give you credit for that.

Listen, there is quite a bit of value in everything that was said here. I haven't got the Blues per se, but I did hear clearly the Member for Lethbridge-West – and I guess because I don't have the Blues, I can't be sure – several times refer to the Minister of Municipal Affairs as the mayor of Alberta or the wannabe mayor of Alberta. It's a tradition in this House that we call people by their proper titles. So we're going to call it a matter of debate for today, but let me assure the Member for Lethbridge-West that, should you go down this road again, it will be called a point of order and you

will be standing up and apologizing and withdrawing for that. Today we're going to call it lighthearted. This is the last day.

There's another one at 2:36 from the other side. Please go ahead.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Mr. Shepherd: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At that time I did call a point of order regarding the remarks from the Minister of Municipal Affairs in his response to the Member for Lethbridge-West under 23(h), (i), and (j), specifically (i), imputing "false or unavowed motives to another Member" or under (j), using "abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." At that point the Minister for Municipal Affairs said something to the effect of, not having the Blues in front of me, "there it is . . . buried in the 14th question," et cetera, attempting to defend allowing children to access pornography.

Now, Mr. Speaker, you again have said repeatedly that we are not allowed to state what is in another member's mind or what a member intends. What the Minister of Municipal Affairs has done – I imagine if, when they rise, they may attempt to do so again by extending and prolonging debate. But he is imposing a very particular interpretation, a deeply insulting and abusive interpretation, of the reasons people would have for opposing a policy they are putting forward. Simply stating opposition to their policy does not amount to wanting to expose children to pornography. That is despicable language and a despicable accusation, and it was directed specifically at an individual member.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs has no grounds to make assumptions about the reason why the Member for Lethbridge-West opposes the particular policy in his legislation. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I would argue that this is absolutely a point of order.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I disagree with the member opposite. By that same logic the members are accusing the government of being a separatist government just because we initiated a piece of legislation that allowed direct democracy in this province to happen. In this Chamber the Minister of Municipal Affairs was answering a question specifically about public libraries and how this legislation is going to restrict access of young kids to pornography. If the members opposite want kids to have access to pornography, then they should vote against this bill. They would be joining the ranks of people like Senator Kristopher Wells, who has also advocated for more access to graphic images of pornography.

Mr. Speaker, while I appreciate that the members opposite are a little sensitive about this topic, because I know they're going to vote against this bill and in doing so will be supporting access to pornography, maybe the members opposite might want to have a look internally and ask themselves whether or not they're built for this job, built for this work, and whether or not . . .

The Speaker: Okay. All right. No, that's enough of that.

What I have here says,

. . . will always defend the right of parents to make decisions for their children. Members opposite: I don't know how they come up with this or what polling they're looking at, but saying that seven-year-olds should have access to pornographic material at the government's expense is outrageous, inappropriate, and why you should always vote United Conservative in . . . elections.

Here's what I don't know, which is part of my problem here, is whether it's actually against the law for young people to have pornographic material. If it was, it would certainly be a point of order, but I just don't know. Like, I think it's a terrible idea,

personally, but my personal opinion doesn't really count in this; it counts on the rules here. But I will say to the hon. minister that this type of comment will indeed create disorder in the House. This is another one of those things that, should it be repeated, may well become a point of order. Honestly, I plead guilty of my own ignorance, not knowing whether that's against the law, because you can't accuse somebody else of breaking the law. It's kind of . . . [interjection]

Hon. minister, now you can stand up and apologize. Yep. It's a point of order.

Mr. Williams: Sorry. For what?

The Speaker: No. You're going to stand up and apologize and withdraw it right now.

Mr. Williams: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I would . . .

The Speaker: You're going to stand up and apologize and withdraw it. You can do it anywhere else you want after that.

Mr. Williams: Is this a capricious decision because you do not like me speaking . . .

The Speaker: No. No. You can stand up and apologize and withdraw it.

Mr. Williams: Is it a point of order, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Williams: Your decision momentarily was that it was not.

The Speaker: Yes. I hadn't sat down yet.

Mr. Williams: The capricious nature of that I think is outrageous. I apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you.

Let it be known that when I am ruling on points of order, I have the floor. I will not take debate, I will not take backtalk, and I will not take smart talk. Those are your rules that I'm enforcing, just for the record, not mine; yours.

The next point of order is at 2:39.

Mr. Shepherd: We'll withdraw that one, Mr. Speaker.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 21

Interprovincial Trade Mutual Recognition Act

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move third reading of Bill 21, the Interprovincial Trade Mutual Recognition Act.

I appreciate the support of both sides having given this bill along with the constructive debates throughout the various stages. Now, Mr. Speaker, as we enter third reading, I would like to take this opportunity to correct some of the misunderstandings the opposition appears to have when it comes to internal trade.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

First, Madam Speaker, and what I think is most important on this acknowledgement is that Alberta is a leader on this issue and has

been for quite some time. It is something that we have been talking about for a while, and we are the first to really take serious action on removing exceptions under the Canadian free trade agreement. There are still some in place, which is intentional, as keeping them is essential to protecting health and safety within different industries in Alberta, but the fact is that while we started, other provinces are just following, and everyone is simply playing for second place as Alberta has already locked up the gold medal.

Now, perhaps you wonder why Alberta didn't have all these flashy announcements, and it's simply because we already did most of the work back in the early years of this United Conservative government when we were elected in 2019 and, in historic fashion, removed the NDP from power, resetting Alberta to being a business-friendly jurisdiction, not one that is sympathetic to communist ideologies, something that they still espouse opposite, of course, with the Leap Manifesto.

Back to this. Now, when it comes to introducing this legislation sooner, many provinces did rush to put in their own legislation, and they are now back doing amendments, something we did not want to have to do. We took time to learn from other jurisdictions instead of bringing forward a bill that encompasses the mutual recognition act on the sale of goods, and that was signed last year. I hear comments from the opposition saying that the New Democrats will stand with businesses, and I can tell you that nothing could be further from the truth, Madam Speaker.

3:10

Now, tell me: how exactly does a party that runs on hiking corporate income tax by 38 per cent stand with businesses? It doesn't make sense. How does the party that pushes unexpected minimum wage hikes stand with businesses, particularly without consulting them? How does the party that increases the cost of everything stand with businesses? The fact is, Madam Speaker, they don't. The fact is clear. It has never been and will never be the New Democrats who stand with businesses.

Now, I hear it time and time again how this government and how the work we're doing is supporting businesses, supporting growth, and how Alberta is the most competitive jurisdiction in which to do business. During debate members talked about how this legislation doesn't apply to labour mobility or credential recognition. That is correct. Good observation by the members opposite. They read the bill, or at least parts of it, or maybe their staff did. That is because those are already addressed under Alberta's Labour Mobility Act. This legislation focuses on the sale of goods, Madam Speaker. Now, when it comes to ministerial authority this legislation ensures that any exemptions made are done transparently and by way of ministerial order. It allows future mutual recognition agreements to be implemented faster through regulation and ensures we can protect our interests and our standards.

Before I close, I'd like to take a minute to address some of the comments I heard about Alberta's response to tariffs. Now, Madam Speaker, the comments made by the NDP couldn't make more clear just how out of touch with reality they are. Their form is to criticize, whereas we look for ways to make the province better through working with our partners and creating new trade agreements. I would encourage members to take a moment to look at Scotiabank's provincial outlook published on January 19 of this year. In it you will see that Alberta has by far the lowest average tariff rate of any major province.

Now, I have to wonder: does the NDP really think that this work the government did and the work that our Premier did through diplomacy had no impact on that? If they think that, they are sorely mistaken, Madam Speaker. These things don't happen by accident. They take work. They take time. They take relationship building,

something the members opposite know little about. Perhaps, if you're late on this, then you see as well that Alberta is projected to lead with economic growth to '26 and '27. Again, another win for the province. We see it time and time again. The NDP are so caught up in ideology that they refuse to acknowledge that sometimes elbows up isn't always the right way to go, but I guess when you're a hammer, everything looks like a nail.

Now, let's be realistic because of Alberta's \$182 billion of international exports, over 90 per cent of which goes to the United States. Unless you've been living under a rock but you've been a member of this Chamber, you would know that for the last several months we've stood in this Chamber and debated our relationship with trading partners, particularly the United States. Make no mistake. Alberta defends a tariff-free relationship and will continue to seek a tariff-free relationship with the United States, but there's an emphasis on the word relationship, and that means spending time. The members opposite and the Leader of the Opposition spends most of his time in this Chamber criticizing the President of the United States, criticizing Saudi Arabia, criticizing the U.A.E., and frankly, criticizing anyone that the government chooses to do business with.

I can tell you from experience, from things that I hear from trading partners and businesses that I meet when I go overseas and the United States, that they are listening. They hear what the members opposite are saying, and they are not pleased to think that an opposition, a so-called government in waiting, which will never happen, is choosing to throw insults – choosing to throw insults – rather than build relationships. That is not diplomacy. That is not how you build relationships. That is how you destroy them.

Alberta will continue to be a defender of our province's best interests. This government will defend our province's best interests under the leadership of the Premier, knowing full well that if we need to build a new relationship, need to build a new trade pipeline, being able to pick up the phone with someone with whom you have a relationship is crucial, not to spend the first several months or several years of your tenure trying to mend fences after you've cast aspersions for the prior three, four years, which is exactly what's happening with the members opposite. They couldn't build a relationship if their government depended on it. Now, lucky for us, they're not in government and will not be.

On this side of the House we will continue to break down trade barriers not only with international partners but right here within Canada. Madam Speaker, that is the job of the province of Alberta, the government, to break down those barriers to help get our world-class products that are manufactured right here in Alberta to other jurisdictions.

That's how you support business. You don't tear down the opportunities. You don't hike up the corporate taxes. You don't make labour mobility more difficult. You support businesses by creating an environment where businesses can thrive. It goes back to one of the most fundamental principles of conservatism, which is this: governments don't create wealth.

Governments do not create wealth. Governments create an environment where wealth can be created. [interjections] Now, I hear the members opposite heckling this principle, the Marxist caucus opposite. It makes sense because they know best; they know how to create jobs. The only jobs the members opposite created when they were in government were ones that came from Ontario all the way to Alberta to change light bulbs and shower heads, and then they posted those numbers and spiked the football. Sorry. A sports reference is probably lost on the members opposite. They decided that they probably know best about how to create these jobs.

But it's not actually creating wealth, Madam Speaker. You're taking government money, which is taxpayer money, using it to pay employees to do jobs that anybody can do on their own. Heaven knows I've changed lots of light bulbs myself. I didn't even need a ladder. I don't need to hire someone to come and do that. I want to be able to look myself in the mirror at the end of the day.

Now, I will say this as I close my remarks. You can't fix relationships overnight. It takes time. It takes effort. It takes a phone call. It takes text messages. It takes meetings, official and unofficial, and that's what the Premier has done. That's what members of our government caucus have been doing, liaising with partners across the border into the United States and other jurisdictions around the world to share this message, that Alberta is open for business and we have been since 2019, when we punted the NDP out of government.

Now, Madam Speaker, I hope the members got that... [interjections] Well, when you're punting, you're not going for extra points. I would point out to the members opposite that you're punting the football away. You're not actually going for three or one points as an extra point or a three-point conversion. That actually just proves how little the members know about sports. You're not punting for points. That was really embarrassing for the members opposite. I would suggest they just stop talking about sports altogether.

Anyways, on this side of the House we're going to keep growing the economy. We're going to keep creating jobs by creating an environment where jobs can be created, Madam Speaker, and leading the nation in economic growth.

I'll finish on this. We've seen record investment in this province, record growth in the economy, record manufacturing expansion, things like CAE partnering with WestJet at the centre of excellence. We've seen the water bomber facilities going up with De Havilland, looking at Lufthansa Technik, looking at Coca-Cola Bottling Company expanding their facilities. Madam Speaker, the list goes on and on.

This does not happen by accident. Companies believe that Alberta is the best place to invest, and as a result of the environment that we've created in the last seven years, we're also leading the nation in job creation, billions of investment, 100,000 new jobs created over the last year, which, by the way, is a far cry ahead of even second place.

I ask the members opposite in closing, and I ask the members opposite in earnest: how many jobs do we need to create before they'll recognize the success of this government? How many billions of dollars of investment need to come to this province because of the relationships we've created before they will recognize the successes of this government? Madam Speaker, when will the members opposite get on Team Alberta and recognize that our plan, the plan of the Premier to put Albertans first, to put job creation first, to put manufacturing first, to put investment attraction first, is working? Until they do, I cannot, and Albertans should not, take the members opposite seriously.

3:20

What they can take seriously is our commitment as a government to continue to stand for what's best for this province. That is growing the economy, supporting job growth, attracting investment, all of which help pay for the vital front-line services like education, health care that we're delivering at a world-class level right here in this province.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. With that, I move third reading of this bill.

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

Member Ellingson: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 21, the Interprovincial Trade Mutual Recognition Act. I guess, since our side of the House is not being taken seriously, it probably won't matter to the other side that I was going to say that we support the bill, probably because we're not communists and we think that we should be making moves to support businesses and grow trade and business development in Alberta, and this act does that.

Madam Speaker, you know, with your permission I'll talk a little bit more about trade and development and creation of jobs. I guess all I can say is that maybe the other side of the House must be feeling a little bit beaten up lately that they need to look for ways for people to like them.

I'm also going to say as I go into this that I'm not going to feel badly about not knowing a lot about sports. I don't think that people elected me in Calgary-Foothills for my knowledge of sports. I think, oddly, the people of Calgary-Foothills elected me because of my knowledge of the economy, because I could go door to door and talk to them about how through my career as a consultant and as vice-president of strategy for Calgary Economic Development, designing economic strategy plans for municipalities all across this country and knowing how we can attract business and investment into their communities and their municipalities and talk about the diversification of our economy and how we can build on our success and be even more successful in the future – I think that's why the constituents of Calgary-Foothills elected me as their MLA.

So let's talk about that a little bit, about business investment and attraction. Yes, this bill is a good idea. I'm certainly not going to stand up and deny that Alberta has been a leader in removing trade barriers and working with other provinces. We, like other provinces, are very dependent on trade, including trade with other provinces. We can see from StatsCan that in Canada, while not the largest, you know, portion of trade, because we do a lot of export business with other nations, most notably the United States – and, granted, it is a little bit offensive when the President of the United States says that they don't need any of our products and don't need to be working with Canada. Please forgive us for taking a little bit of offence and thinking that maybe we do need to work against that. But even internal trade in Canada is worth upwards of \$530 billion, Madam Speaker, representing about 20 per cent of Canada's GDP. So internal trade is incredibly important.

This bill, as the minister noted, is mostly about the movement of goods, but we can't forget about the trade of services also between provinces. It may be that some of my colleagues in debating about the bill might have asked some questions about also the trade in services and whether or not we're doing everything that we can to grow our trade in services. It's estimated that if we did, all of us, all provinces, move forward in removing all barriers to trade in both goods and services, we could see a significant boost in GDP across the country. It may be that other provinces are going to see a larger boost than Alberta, but we could also see a boost here in Alberta if we continue to move towards that.

The members opposite may not be interested because this might be considered a woke organization. The International Monetary Fund suggested that Canada could increase its GDP by 7 per cent if we removed all interprovincial trade barriers. That is, you know, a goal that we should be striving towards, and I'm glad to see that that is a goal that we are striving towards.

It is notable, though perhaps my colleagues had talked about it in previous debate, that there are traded goods, agricultural goods that for health and safety reasons are notably exempt from Bill 21. I think we should note that while this is certainly no reason to hold back Bill 21 from passing, we need to continue to do our work across the country to make sure that the health and safety standards between

provinces are aligned so that we can raise the profile of our agricultural goods and more effectively move agriculture, food, and beverage goods between provinces. As we know, agriculture is a significant industry in Alberta. It's the second-largest industry when it comes to exporting goods overseas. So we should continually look to – and I hope that we're strongly making moves to align our health and safety standards across this country so that we can export more of our incredible agricultural goods to other provinces.

Now, I'll also say, Madam Speaker, that when we're talking about the goals of Bill 21 in growing businesses across this province in many different industries, that also doesn't mean that we stop talking about other ways that we can help businesses grow and prosper. As we asked some questions earlier in the House today, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business has voiced concern in a letter to the Minister of Finance about how fuel taxes are punishing small businesses, transportation businesses, agricultural businesses. So we should be, the government should be considering in this moment looking past the framework or changing the framework that's in place to provide that relief to businesses. They, just like families, are experiencing a cost crunch, and we should be looking for ways – and one of those ways is to remove the fuel tax when we know that prices today are even upwards of \$100 a barrel. So even though Bill 21 is moving in the right direction, it doesn't mean that we stop talking about all of those other ways that we can grow businesses.

I, for one, on this side of the House am proud to say as an Alberta NDP member that I do want to grow business in this province. I do want to grow the economy of this province. That's why I came to this job in the first place. In doing that, Madam Speaker, I will support Bill 21 because it is supporting the growth of businesses and jobs in this province.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to Bill 21?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 23 Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2026

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

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm certainly pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 23, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2026.

Like all justice statute amendment acts, this deals with a number of things, and I'll speak to some of those here this afternoon. This bill, if passed, would dramatically increase and improve our accountability processes when it comes to public-sector compensation reporting. The Premier has given me a mandate to review our elections-related legislation and make recommendations that strengthen the public trust in the integrity, in the transparency, and in the accountability of elections and direct democracy processes. This work has been a priority for this government for the last year. Following these amendments, people in Alberta have been participating directly in democracy through citizen initiatives and recall petitions. After a year of seeing these processes at work, we think it's important to continue to review and refine them.

3:30

First, we're making amendments to the Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act. The compensation disclosure threshold

under the act would be lowered to \$130,000 in order to strengthen public accountability. The second requirement for a second severance disclosure in a calendar year would essentially be removed by the amendment, if passed, to return to a single annual disclosure, as recommended by the Standing Committee on Families and Communities. These updates to the Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act would maintain strong transparency by allowing Albertans to see where their money is going, but it would also reduce red tape by getting rid of the redundant second reporting requirement.

Next we're amending the Citizen Initiative Act. Proposed amendments would enhance transparency and accountability by allowing scrutineers to participate in the signature verification process. To make sure that signature sheets are available if there are concerns about that verification process, successful citizen initiative petition signature sheets would be retained for a period of two years rather than the current one-year requirement. Deadlines for holding a referendum resulting from a successful citizen-led initiative proposal would be repealed. Repealing fixed deadlines for referendums would ensure that these referendums can be scheduled appropriately, and it would allow for more predictability and flexibility.

Similar to other amendments, proposed changes to the Recall Act would allow the MLA named in a recall petition and the petition applicant to appoint scrutineers as well. Amendments to the Recall Act would also clarify that the CEO of Elections Alberta must keep successful recall petition signature sheets until a recall vote is complete.

Finally, Madam Speaker, Bill 23 ensures that our elections remain fair and honest. It's why Bill 23 includes a prohibition on the creation and distribution of deepfakes, that are likely to mislead voters, that are likely to create confusion about statements or the true conduct of a candidate. Public confidence is essential to a healthy democracy. It's essential to the integrity of elections here in this province, and the emergence of deepfakes presents a real threat to this confidence.

Now, we've seen the development of deepfakes in all aspects of our lives. We've seen them on social media. We've seen them posted in various places, and the more that time passes, the more accurate they become and the more difficult they become to distinguish. Bill 23 would deal with that by laying out significant fines that could be imposed on those who do not comply with the law. Individuals could be fined a maximum penalty of \$10,000, and entities could also face up to \$100,000 if they were found not to comply with these restrictions. We're committed to protecting the integrity of our elections and our democracy. We know that other jurisdictions are doing the exact same thing, including our federal government, who has also introduced legislation to deal with this exact issue, Madam Speaker.

We believe that protecting our democracy is at the forefront of all of these amendments. There's a lot of content in this bill, Madam Speaker, but as I wrap up, I'd like to be clear. Our democracy is far better when Albertans from all walks of life with diverse voices participate, and as a government we'll always ensure that our democracy is one of trust and openness.

With that, I move second reading of Bill 23, Madam Speaker, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2026. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others that wish to join the debate on second reading of Bill 23? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to join debate on Bill 23. I will make some comments about the contents of the bill, some overall principles at play in these changes, and some of the comments that were made by the minister. The minister talked

about democracy and how these changes will somehow improve democracy. So far what we have seen coming from this government has not helped strengthen our institution of democracy, and the changes that are contained in this bill as well do not help much. For instance, our democracy depends on separation of powers between executive, Legislature, judicial branch. What we have seen from this government: their willingness to interfere, for instance, in the judicial branch, interfere with the working of the Legislature.

The Legislature, for instance, works best when the independent officers of the Legislature are able to do their job without any political interference whatsoever. In this bill what government is doing here is that they are adding more government-appointed, minister-appointed scrutineers for the signature verification process. They will present it as an accountability oversight process, but what they have failed to do: they have failed to show any evidence whatsoever that that independent officer of the Legislature was not doing the job as assigned or that there were any concerns raised by anyone that there are some things in the work of that independent office that need to be overseen by scrutineers picked by and appointed by the minister's office. So I do not believe that these kind of amendments in any way help strengthen the working of that independent office of the Legislature.

That's not the first time that the minister has tried to insert his office, this government, into the working of that independent office. There were previous bills where changes were made with respect to the Citizen Initiative Act, where they even took away the independent office of the Legislature's – namely, Elections Alberta – power to refer matters to the court. Now those things will be decided in the minister's office. Which referendum petition could go ahead, which question can go ahead: that will now be determined in the minister's office. Those were the things, I guess, better left for the independent office of the Legislature, but this government, this executive in particular, cannot stay in its lane.

Now they're making changes to the Citizen Initiative Act. I don't know if it's the third time or fourth time since this bill became law in 2022 under Premier Jason Kenney. At that time the benefit of this kind of Citizen Initiative Act was described that this will give Albertans the ability to participate directly in democracy, that it's direct democracy and they were empowering Albertans and all kind of nice things that they could say at that time about this bill.

So Albertans got empowered, and they collected within three months over half a million signatures in support of the province staying in Canada and against this government's separatist rhetoric. But since the government doesn't like that part, the government didn't take any action on that yet and has completely disregarded that civic engagement of more than half a million Albertans.

3:40

Under the previous situation of changes to the Citizen Initiative Act this government gave powers to the Elections Alberta CEO to refer cases to the Court of King's Bench if there are questions and concerns relating to the constitutionality of these referendums. Elections Alberta did send one such question to the Court of King's Bench, and many concerned, interested Albertans participated in that process. They spent time, resources. They incurred expenses. Many First Nations participated in those proceedings, having a vested interest in the outcome of those proceedings.

After the matter was heard, after people made presentations to the King's Bench, after First Nations made their case, government then decided to limit the court's ability to judicially review things under this Citizen Initiative Act and tried to cut the court out of the process and concentrate power in the minister's office. Nonetheless, the matter was already heard, and a decision was handed down. The decision was very clear, in black and white, that

any petition under the Citizen Initiative Act that has the potential to or that violates the Constitution, that violates Indigenous treaty rights protected and guaranteed under the Constitution cannot be allowed. That was, I guess, in a nutshell, the decision.

But the government tried to circumvent the court. The government tried to cut the court out of the process so that they can push ahead with whatever referendums they want to put on the ballot. The court noted that the way government interfered in the court process through these changes was against the rule of law, was against the idea of separation of executive, legislative, and judicial. Instead of taking that decision seriously, they pushed those changes ahead and did in fact concentrate power in the minister's office, in the government's hands and did in fact eliminate the court's ability to hear matters under this act, did eliminate the Chief Electoral Officer's ability to send matters to the courts under this act.

Initially the criteria for citizen initiatives was that if 20 per cent of electors who participated in the most recent previous election were in favour of something and they're able to collect those 20 per cent signatures in three months, then the government will take action on their petition. That was the criteria when the Forever Canadian petition, initiated by Thomas Lukaszuk, was started. They, in fact, crossed that threshold quite comfortably and raised over 567,000 signatures within three months. That was not possible or doable for separatist groups who were also trying to bring forward similar petitions under the Citizen Initiative Act.

So what the government did: the government introduced changes to the Citizen Initiative Act. They lowered the signature threshold to 10 per cent, and they extended the timeline from three months to four months so that they can put together a petition which the government, in fact, wants them to put together. Now they're saying that we have had enough of these petitions, so now they're putting some limitations on this exercise of direct democracy by Albertans, that you cannot bring one petition within one year after the general election or within one year before the general election.

That's the third or fourth time the government is amending this legislation, and they're using the Legislature's time to, I guess, play political games, to do things which nobody really is asking for. People are asking this government to focus on the cost-of-living crisis, jobs, access to health care, access to education, public safety, but they have been prioritizing this separatist movement, this separatist rhetoric, these separatist initiatives. For them, they can open up any legislation any number of times at any sitting, but when Albertans ask for some kind of relief – for instance, lately we have been asking this government to change legislation to give Albertans relief at the pump. The government has passed legislation that has a certain formula that if the price of WTI stays above a certain threshold for a quarter, then the government will give relief at the pump.

But because of the rising cost of living, because of this government's policies such as adding to people's property taxes – for instance, in Calgary there is a 21 per cent increase – people are feeling the pinch right now, and they are feeling that pain at the gas pumps, too. They're asking this government to act, but when Albertans are asking, when lay people who are struggling to make ends meet are asking, the government refuses to amend that legislation. They will not do that. In fact, the Finance minister said that very clearly even this afternoon. But when their friends ask them to amend the Citizen Initiative Act, they will just do it at any time they see fit.

Again, these changes will not, I guess, result in any significant enhancement of democracy, as the minister claimed, any significant relief for Albertans who are struggling to make ends meet. These changes will not help with hospital wait times. These changes will

not put schools in our communities or improve public safety in our communities. These changes may serve the government's political needs. What really will, I guess, help democracy is if the government can stay in its lane, stop interfering in the justice system, stop threatening to withhold judicial funds, and those kinds of things.

The second thing that the minister mentioned: he actually used those words, that the changes he's making to the public-sector disclosure act will, and I quote, dramatically improve accountability and transparency. Madam Speaker, what the minister is doing is that those severance pays at present are disclosed twice a year, once in June and once in December.

The minister of education is very interested in my comments, so I guess he would be interested in knowing that reducing the disclosure from two times a year to just one time doesn't dramatically improve accountability and transparency. That's simple math, and being minister of education, he understands that. That's why he's interested in that.

3:50

Nothing can be further from the truth. If you are limiting disclosures from twice a year to once a year, that's not improving accountability. That's not improving transparency. That, I guess, could only be interpreted as improving transparency in the UCP world, but for the rest of Albertans, that's removing transparency and the government's record when it comes to transparency is not good.

They should not be doing those kinds of things at a time when they are being investigated for irregularities in health procurement. They are being investigated for corruption allegations, and all kinds of things. Reducing those kind of measures will remove transparency. We do want to see who is getting fired and how much they are getting on a more timely basis because the government is doing that quite frequently.

One more thing that the minister claimed will enhance democracy is that they are repealing the deadline to hold a referendum and any obligation for the government to act on a referendum petition. Again, I don't understand the logic. They believe in direct democracy; they lowered the threshold so that a citizen initiative can come forward in a reasonable way and they'll be able to collect those signatures in a reasonable time. They gave them an extra month to collect that time. Then they are removing any obligation that the government has in the legislation to act on those citizen petitions. In other words, they want Albertans to go through that process, they want canvassers to go door to door and get those signatures, they want people to spend money, time, and resources to put those petitions together, but they are now removing that provision where government was required to act on those referendums.

These are just pressure walls for this government so that there is no other right-wing party before the next election, so that they can save their political future, political hides. It's not strengthening democracy and accountable government if they are asking Albertans to take time out, spend resources on an initiative. An accountable government of the people will respond to them in a timely fashion. We know from the government's action on the Forever Canadian petition that they do not believe in democracy of any sort, whether direct or indirect. If they were to believe, there were 567,000 Albertans who asked this government just to simply pass a motion in this Legislature and say, without that long word salad, that we denounce separatism and we are Canadian and acknowledge that separatism is hurting investment climate and the province's reputation.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I am pleased to rise and speak to Bill 23. It's another omnibus bill coming forward, but what I would say is the top line on this is that this isn't really how the legislative process is meant to work. I feel like this bill sort of misunderstands a bunch of things about the legislative branch and the executive branch and independent officers and judicial officers and just sort of how our system of laws and democracy is meant to be set up. It's problematic in several ways.

Madam Speaker, because I am so rarely given the opportunity to say this about this minister, I would like to start with the thing I like about this bill. There aren't a lot of opportunities to say something nice about something this government is doing. Actually, the deepfake stuff seems pretty good. Would I maybe tweak it a little one way or the other? Perhaps, but I think this is a real problem, and it's a real problem that's really being addressed, and that is not something I get to say often about this government, so I'm going to take the opportunity to put that on record.

The other portions of the bill, however, are extremely problematic, so I'm going to start with what is in my view the most problematic, the amendments to the Citizen Initiative Act. This is referendums. This is the fourth set of changes that this government has made. That doesn't suggest that they did a very good job of it the first time. When you have to come back to the Legislature every single sitting to be like, "Whoops, we got it wrong again; whoops, we gotta change it again," that doesn't suggest a well-done job.

The government brought this in in order to allow a separatist petition to go forward, and then they discovered some errors. Forever Canada came forward; it was successful. There were concerns that their separatist friends would be unsuccessful, so they trotted forward again and changed the number of signatures to tilt the playing field, changed the length of time that the separatists needed to get their signatures, and also gave themselves complete authority to say what the Constitution says. Now, of course, they can't do that because that's not how constitutions work, but they've tried, so here we are.

Those are three very distinct instances of a government that is trying to cheat for their friends, to allow their friends to have different rules than everyone else. We've seen this in a number of instances, but I'll stay focused on this particular bill. Now we've seen this get slanted in favour of their friends – fewer signatures, more time, and no need to follow the laws – which is incredibly problematic.

The next thing I would say about the changes here, Madam Speaker, is: why does the minister need a scrutineer? Like, I get the point of scrutineers. I think it's good. Political parties have this. It seems like a reasonable thing to extend both to the Recall Act and to the Citizen Initiative Act, but why does the minister need it? Like, the minister isn't meant to have an interest in this.

The point of a citizens' initiative is supposed to be that citizens on one side or the other are kind of working it out themselves. The citizens propose the petition. They come forward; they would get a scrutineer. But the minister gets a scrutineer, especially a minister who's already demonstrated a tendency to intervene on one side? That seems highly problematic. The minister had the opportunity to explain why he would want this earlier, and he did not take it, which is also suggestive.

Madam Speaker, I really do think that these are problems. It's inappropriate. This is an independent office. It's meant to remain independent, and the minister doesn't need a scrutineer to know that it's independent. I mean, the independence has been eroded, but it

was eroded by him, so I don't think he needs a scrutineer to figure that out.

They also had previously moved the determination of constitutionality from the Chief Electoral Officer to the minister, I mean, basically because they knew their friends' petition was unconstitutional and they wanted to circumvent that. So this is a government that definitely is not neutral on this matter. I think actions speak much louder than words, and in this case they're clear. Well, I mean, it is a direct incidence of trying to control judges. I think all of that is extremely problematic.

4:00

What I would say as well is that with respect to both the Recall Act and the referendum bit, Citizen Initiative Act, they're saying that only lawyers can be scrutineers, which I actually think is a little bit unnecessary, right? Folks use scrutineers all the time. I mean, it seems expensive and unnecessary. I can't see any reason for it. One possible reason, if I were to speculate on a way in which this could be good, could be that we know that lawyers are bound by the ethics and accountability and competence rules of the Law Society. Well, actually, all lawyers but one lawyer are bound by the ethics and accountability rules of the Law Society. One gave himself a get-out-of-jail-free card. Obviously, I have some opinions on that. That's the only real reason that I could see for only allowing lawyers. Yeah. I just don't see why it's necessary. Like, that's not the case anywhere else. But again, maybe there's a good reason. You know what? That's just me being too optimistic. All evidence to the contrary. We'll just leave it at that.

The other thing worth noting is the public-sector compensation disclosure act. This is a change from six months to a year. In general I would say that that's maybe not the end of the world. My problem with it is that it also changes the disclosure on severance from six months to a year. What this government is doing here is – they're trying to hope that the public will forget. They're hoping that the public attention span is short, and they won't notice what the government is doing. You know, honestly, Madam Speaker, if I were the government, I would also want to hide my work because it is quite embarrassing. Like, quite embarrassing.

Yeah. Essentially, what it'll do – so we restructured AHS into four different divisions. This was badly planned, badly executed. A bunch of things fell through the cracks. I mean, this is what happens when you just wake up one day and make policy on a political basis without doing the hard work of governing or thinking it through. In addition to costing a whole bunch of money and achieving absolutely nothing, it also resulted in a series of severances. You know what? The public deserves to know. The public deserves to know how much that cost. Why? Because I think the taxpayer has an interest in knowing that their money is being well spent, and this is a government who is not doing that. They are not spending the public's money well.

They reorganized AHS into these four, five – I don't know; it seems to keep changing – branches. One can barely keep up. Like, this has not only achieved nothing; actually, wait times in ERs for surgeries just about on every measure: the health care system is now performing worse than it was before they made these changes, and it cost an enormous amount of money. I think the public deserves to know how much money and to make their own judgments. That's what we call democracy. I think that that is really important.

Madam Speaker, the final thing that I will say about this bill is that it really shows the government's hand. We've seen the Minister of Finance standing up over and over and saying: "I couldn't possibly change the legislation to remove the gas tax. That would be impossible. It's in legislation. How can one possibly change legislation?" Well, this is the fourth time that the Minister

of Justice has changed the legislation in favour of his friends. Is it problematic that the executive branch has essentially captured the legislative branch under the UCP? They have no respect for separation of powers. Yeah, that's extremely problematic. But what the Minister of Justice's, like, giving things away to his separatist friends demonstrates clearly is that this government is perfectly capable of changing legislation, which means that they are perfectly capable of changing the gas tax legislation. They just choose not to.

To sum up, Madam Speaker, this is a bill that, with the exception of, like I said, the deepfake thing, which I like to say that I like because I can't think of anything else to say that I like about this minister, this is not a good bill. It's not a good bill, and I really think the government should do better.

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

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Madam Speaker. What is becoming increasingly evident by the UCP is that this government does not actually like democracy, especially when others hold opinions that oppose theirs. We see it in here, and we see it in their legislation such as Bill 23.

On page 2 of this bill, section 1.11(1)(a), it's actually preventing Albertans from submitting a citizen-led petition 12 months before and after the next fixed election. It's pretty rich. Clearly, not the democracy-loving government they tout to be, eh, Madam Speaker? We just heard from the minister how this government thinks that this bill will enhance democracy. Well, my friend from Calgary-Bhullar-McCall said that these changes do not help democracy much. It does not. I agree with my friend from Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. And I would agree with the minister when he says that our democracy is far better when Albertans from all walks of life get to share their views freely and that our democracy is one of trust and openness, but in action this government does not actually practise what it preaches.

I'll get into this in a few moments, Madam Speaker, but reviewing the legislation and hearing the minister speak about how transparency is inserted with including scrutineers to review signature validity, I am curious how this government views more cooks in the kitchen accomplishing this transparency. Looking at the scrutineering sections that are being added in the Citizen Initiative Act – namely, around the scrutineering and the approval process – for a government so intent on cutting red tape, they are exceptionally good at creating more red tape unnecessarily.

What end does the minister have for these changes other than that the UCP keeps having to fix mistakes and gaps for their hasty ideological laws that they force onto Albertans because of a small fringe minority that have really taken the adage “The squeaky wheel gets the grease” quite literally? My, oh my, are they ever so loud. So loud that they were able to force the UCP to lower the bar for them and, clearly, at the snap of their fingers because now the minister is coming back with more caretaking legislation to fix the omissions for a fourth time. Madam Speaker, this bill is just another example of the UCP's incompetence, and frankly Albertans have had enough.

I bring up legal competence quite intentionally here because the requirement to have only lawyers in good standing as scrutineers is an interesting inclusion. Aside from undermining the autonomy of the Chief Electoral Officer, I really suppose we just have to guess what the other side is doing with this. Perhaps the UCP is trying to backtrack for attacking the legal community through underfunding legal aid, raiding the purse of the Law Foundation, and trying to usurp the self-regulation of our profession in exchange for scrutineer positions under citizen-led petitions. This is what the

UCP thinks of our profession but also what the UCP thinks about nonlawyer Albertans who could do this job and who have been scrutineers throughout our elections.

I agree with my friend from Calgary-Mountain View, who said that using lawyers for scrutineering is unnecessary, and quite frankly I think it's going to be quite expensive. I'm also curious what regulations the minister will put forward for the rate of pay that he thinks lawyers as scrutineers deserve. I wonder if it's the same rate he pays government lawyers or perhaps the rate of external counsel that this government relies on. I guess we'll find out. Probably not because UCP and transparency or whatever they say they do.

Now on to section 44.9499995(1). I'm not kidding; that's the number. While deepfakes are something that should concern all members in this House, what this addition to the act does is punish Albertans for making those funny memes of this UCP government but also on this side, too. I know we need strong legislation when it comes to deepfakes because they are becoming far more prevalent and hard to distinguish between real and fake. They create chaos in our communities and should be something we, along with the federal government, should correctly be legislating on.

Madam Speaker, when I think of deepfakes, I think of a recent conversation I had with my constituent Nancy, who provided me a photo of foxes in their dens. It was very clearly AI, but Nancy had a real, legitimate idea that this was a real photograph and shared it with me. Our media literacy in this modern age and across the world, not just in Alberta, is woefully inadequate even for someone like me, who has grown up with the Internet. I'm sure there are other concerning photos that exist of many of us in this Chamber that are deepfakes.

4:10

We are seeing that it is becoming difficult to distinguish fact from fiction. We agree that this piece in this omnibus bill is required, but I want us to consider an element of balance here. Yes, we must protect our democracy by these deepfakes being proliferated among our communities and causing chaos and that real satire and comedy that oftentimes provides a release valve for Albertans, now especially. We need that balance. This legislation does not include that.

I think of one Conservative supporter – and I'll be generous here to call him a, quote, influencer, end quote – whose whole livelihood is going after the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for being a queer, cisgendered woman, using AI to publish photos of her that look nothing like her. Nary a tattoo on that member, I might add, but I digress. Although we in this Chamber are concerned about deepfakes, we must also have a conversation in this context about satire and also the need for comedy to fill in the gaps that these oppressive decisions from government that go after Albertans' rights every single day – this legislation is no different. Its crux of deepfakes is unrealistic, just like the AI-generated photos by Berta Proud Dad or the disgusting racist, homophobic, or transphobic memes generated by folks of all political stripes.

We must really ask ourselves: what are we actually doing here? It is not protecting any of us in this Chamber. It is penalizing political dissent, which is not democratic. It is another power grab by the UCP to control the lives of Albertans, and it is dangerous. Sorry, Berta Proud Dad. This government wants to sue you to the sum of \$10,000 per day for those exaggerated, misogynistic photos you've made of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Or wait, if you've incorporated – why wouldn't you? You have trademark merch that you want to sell – that is \$100,000 a day. So govern yourself accordingly, I guess.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, when I look at this deepfake section, I find it quite interesting that it is so broad, it does not actually deal with other things like addressing agencies that this government is responsible for, departments that have direct impact on the lives of individuals, of Albertans; service Alberta, for example, being deepfaked to send out pertinent information to Albertans that could be considered predatorial against those very Albertans.

Let's look at what some experts are saying. Here in Canada the Canadian Bar Association recognizes that our current tort system is not prepared to deal with the increase in deepfakes, especially for private individuals. The *California Law Review* in 2019 published a paper titled *Deep Fakes: A Looming Challenge for Privacy, Democracy, and National Security* by Bobby Chesney and Danielle Citron. In this article they say that

we should be especially wary of entrusting government officials with the power to determine the veracity of factual claims “made in the often highly ideological context of public discourse . . .” A deep-fakes ban would raise the specter of penalties for parodies of would-be or current office holders . . .

Dislike of minority or unpopular viewpoints, combined with ambiguity surrounding a deep-fake creator's intent, might result in politicized enforcement. This might inhibit engagement in political discourse specifically, and in democratic culture more generally. The “risk of censorious selectivity by prosecutors” [will] . . . distort perspectives made available” to the public. It is far better to forego an outright ban of deep fakes than to run the risk of its abuse.

Even if these normative concerns could be overcome, it is unlikely that a flat ban on deep fakes could withstand constitutional challenge. Deep fakes implicate freedom of expression, even though they involve intentionally false statements.

Another point that we need to consider is when the originator of the deepfake is not in the province of Alberta. How does this legislation attempt to address foreign interference or even extensions to our neighbours in the east and west of us? What happens when B.C. proud dad, if he so exists, decides to make deepfakes, like his Alberta counterpart, against the Premier or any member of cabinet? Mr. Speaker, this legislation does not address any of these concerns, and we need to assure Albertans that we do not have to keep coming back to the drafting table and fix the errors and omissions that are present prior to bringing bills to this House.

An overarching question that looms over these changes to the legislation related to scrutineers' deepfake investigations is: where is the money? When Elections Alberta and the Chief Electoral Officer came to the government and asked for more dollars to address the increase in this direct democracy that this government is proud to tout, which this government has already indicated that only some Albertans are allowed to participate in as long as they align with their government's ideology – undertaking an investigation costs money, Mr. Speaker. I know this government knows that because they have – what? – six investigations on them in the last year alone. All of these investigations cost money.

Setting up a new investigations process for Elections Alberta will require cash investment from this government. Will we see it? Well, only time will tell. Looking at when Elections Alberta did come to this government and ask for additional dollars to conduct the recalls on members on both sides of this aisle, the opposite side gave a big old, “Heck, no.” Then the government ponied up months later to provide just under half of what was asked for.

Mr. Speaker, this does not inspire any hope. Yes, it is good to have legislation in the province to deal with deepfakes, just as the federal government has made steps to address this increasing issue

in our communities, including our online community, but we need realistic guideposts for the reasons I just outlined. It's for these reasons I just can't support this bill or any other bill this government puts forward to interfere with our public institutions without thorough research and transparency to my constituents, the good people of Edmonton-West Henday.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others? The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, please.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and offer some thoughts on Bill 23, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2026. Albertans deserve to have faith in their democratic institutions, including offices like the office of the Chief Electoral Officer, and that those offices are free from political interference or intimidation. The UCP brought in citizen initiative legislation believing Albertans should have more power between election cycles, yet they continue to change that act when Albertans use it in ways that don't benefit them directly. The UCP are annoyed that Albertans have used their own legislation against them, so now they are changing the rules for a third time to limit Albertans' power and the autonomy of the Chief Electoral Officer.

Bill 23 is centralizing power in the minister's office, removing it from Elections Alberta. The UCP are actively diminishing Alberta's democratic institutions, supporting big government, and eroding essential public institutions. Alberta's New Democrats oppose Bill 23. We are disappointed in the UCP's incompetence that has led them to change its legislation three times in one year, and we oppose removing the autonomy of Elections Alberta. Respecting the autonomy of Elections Alberta is paramount to our democracy. The UCP are abusing their power, grossly overreaching into democratic processes, and this is dangerous.

Bill 23 amends four acts. The first act that it amends is the Citizen Initiative Act. Under this bill citizen initiatives can no longer be approved 12 months before or 12 months after an election. The minister and the citizen initiative proponent will appoint one or more scrutineers who are lawyers to observe the work of the Chief Electoral Officer. The Chief Electoral Officer will retain signature sheets of initiatives that meet the requirements for two years.

The second piece of legislation that this bill amends is the election finances disclosure act. This bill protects against deepfakes made against the leader of a political party, leadership contestant, minister, MLA, candidate, nomination contestant, Chief Electoral Officer, Election Commissioner, election officer, a person who was or is employed by the office of the Chief Electoral Officer, a person who was or is employed by the office of the Election Commissioner. Deepfakes that are created to mislead electors about the speech or conduct of an elected person or entity will be subject to penalties; however, if the subject of the deepfake consents, penalties will not apply. The Chief Electoral Officer has the power to remove deepfakes. Penalties for deepfakes are \$10,000 a day for an individual or \$100,000 a day for an entity.

The third piece of legislation that this bill amends is the Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act. Salary or severance of \$130,000 will be reported for employees of the government of Alberta and the public-sector education body or municipal authority that is covered under the act. Disclosure for severance used to be reported twice annually, but now it will be reported just once a year.

The fourth piece of legislation that this act amends is the Recall Act. It adds scrutineers to recall petition processes to oversee the count. A scrutineer will be appointed both from the member named in the petition and the applicant. Only active members of the Law

Society can serve as scrutineers. If a recall vote is ordered, the CEO will keep the petition until the vote and any appeals are concluded.

Just some background on this piece of legislation. Alberta has two petitions on separatism currently circulating: the Forever Canadian petition, which has collected all the required signatures, and the Stay Free petition, which claims that they've collected all of the signatures. On April 10 a judge paused the submission of signatures on the Stay Free petition after the ACFN and the Blackfoot Confederacy sought a judicial review of the decision to authorize the petition. The one-month stay will give the justice time to review the ACFN's case.

4:20

The UCP created the Citizen Initiative Act under Jason Kenney in 2021. The UCP have made multiple changes to the Citizen Initiative Act over the last year. In May of 2025, through Bill 54, the UCP lowered the threshold of required signatures for petitions and extended the signature collection period. This change was largely believed to create achievable metrics for the separatist petition. In December of 2025, through Bill 14, the UCP changed the fees for citizen initiatives from \$500 dollars to \$25,000, transferred power from the CEO to the minister to decide if initiatives proceed, discontinued court proceedings that the CEO brought forward, which stopped the Elections Alberta CEO from seeing an opinion on the constitutionality of the separatist referendum, and made it so that only the minister can refer citizen initiatives to the courts.

I think the key information that all Albertans need to keep in mind with respect to this bill is that currently the government must hold referendums on citizen initiatives on or before general election dates. Bill 23 will stop this practice but will not be retroactive so that the Forever Canadian petition, the separatist petition, the coal petitions won't be affected.

Alberta is one of the only provinces with a standalone Citizen Initiative Act, brought in by the UCP. It's interesting to note that British Columbia has a recall and an initiative act that were brought in in 1995, but British Columbia does not have scrutiny requirements like the UCP want to bring in with Bill 23.

While we support the lowering of the financial disclosure threshold, we do not support cutting back on biannual reporting of severance payments. This limits transparency and leaves Albertans in the dark for longer about the amount paid out. The 2025 threshold for disclosure is \$133,813. That threshold was set in 2015 and is adjusted annually by Alberta's consumer price index. Now the threshold will be set at \$130,000 and adjusted annually by the year-over-year weighted average percentage change in wage settlements for the public sector in Alberta for that previous calendar year. This bill will also change severance from a biannual disclosure rate to an annual.

Bill 52, the Recall Act, came into effect on April 7, 2022. As a result of that, many MLAs had recall petitions leveraged against them in the fall, beginning with the recall against the minister of education during the teachers' strike, but to date none have been successful. Alberta and British Columbia are the only provinces with recall acts. Bill 23 will require scrutineers to be appointed and oversee signature counts for recall petitions, but British Columbia does not do this.

With respect to deepfakes, deepfakes are becoming an increasing threat to elections. Deepfakes of U.S. President Joe Biden circulated before the creator of those deepfakes was fined \$6 million and indicted on criminal charges. Digital influencers are making deepfakes of political figures across the world. The federal government is creating reforms to protect against foreign interference, including deepfakes, through Bill C-25. The Alberta

NDP support the actions taken federally to protect against deepfakes and we support similar actions provincially.

With respect to the Citizen Initiative Act, this act has gone through a number of changes. Bill 54 made a number of changes to the act that pandered to separatists. It reduced signature requirements drastically, from 20 per cent of total electors to 10 per cent of total votes cast in the last provincial election. That meant that separatist groups need far fewer supporters to force divisive sovereignty votes. Based on the turnout from the last provincial election, referendum proponents need 177,732 signatures, which is around 6 per cent of the population, instead of around 602,000 signatures.

It eliminated the requirement to collect signatures from two-thirds of electoral divisions. This enabled separatist organizers to gather signatures entirely from regional strongholds, bypassing the need for broad provincial support. The bill extended the collection time by a full month from 90 to 120 days. This would give separatist groups significantly more time to organize and mobilize their base. It allowed corporate and union funding to open the door for special interest groups with separatist agendas to bankroll referendum campaigns.

Bill 14, the previous Justice Statutes Amendment Act, stripped the Chief Electoral Officer of the authority to review citizen-initiated referenda questions to ensure that they are constitutional, allowed the Justice minister to decide whether a question gets sent to court for review or if it proceeds without any legal check, and killed all pending cases on the constitutionality of referendum before the courts.

The day after the bill was introduced, which was Friday, December 5, Judge Feasby released his decision saying that the Alberta Prosperity Project's proposed referendum question was unconstitutional. Judge Feasby is cited as calling Bill 14 antithetical to the rule of law. That bill removed a critical safeguard that ensured referenda questions were lawful and within provincial jurisdiction. It concentrated power in cabinet rather than allowing arm's-length officials to do their job. We argued at the time that when the separatists called this bill a win, it was obvious where the UCP stood on this issue.

Mr. Speaker, I conclude my remarks.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Currie.

Member Eremenko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my esteemed colleagues for all of their wonderful, thoughtful, and well-considered remarks. They've covered a lot of ground. Of course, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act certainly does, and here we are once again debating the Citizen Initiative Act. It is worth noting and repeating, as the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar had just said, that we are only one of two provinces with citizens' initiative legislation, and I suppose this is a reason why. Clearly, it's hard to get it right.

We are now debating it for the third time in a year. I really sympathize with the people at home who are just thinking, like: what is the government doing? I'm just not really sure. Frankly, it stokes what I think is a sense of mistrust. Right now politics are very divisive. Communities are really being antagonized amongst each other, with others, and trust is a pretty precious commodity right now. I would suggest that this is not a government that is doing much to in fact build trust. Rather, they are in fact eroding it in our communities and in our societies and, frankly, in the confidence that we should be able to have in the legislation that is being introduced.

It seems to be that however the wind is blowing on any given day, well, if we're short on bills to debate, let's crack open that

Citizen Initiative Act once again and, based on historical experience thus far, we can use the Citizen Initiative Act to roll out the red carpet for friends, supporters, and very vocal minorities that are, frankly, trying to tear this country apart.

I understand the level of mistrust. I hold that as well because I just can't understand why they're doing some of the things here in Bill 23 that they are. Why are they introducing scrutineers to verify signatures? This does not need to be a team effort. I don't think that there has ever been any indication or any evidence that for some reason the electoral office is incapable of doing something pretty basic. They are increasingly not resourced adequately as a result of the referendum that this government insists on pushing through, but they do have the resources, and they have the leadership, and as a legislative office, a branch of what we do in these Chambers, they should be well equipped to be able to do that job well.

I'm not sure why scrutineers need to be involved in that process at the expense of the proponent of the petition and at the expense of the minister. For some reason both the proponent and the minister can now place scrutineers in the signature verification process. The same applies for the Recall Act.

Just in the few minutes that I have to stand here and speak to Bill 23, I actually want to emphasize the portion, I believe it's 6.21, that speaks to the deepfakes legislation. Now, again, when we read these bills, of course, as members in the Chambers we're not allowed to presuppose or assume what another member is thinking or planning, but on this one I'm really at a bit of a loss. It's a very specific section in the deepfakes part that talks about how an individual, a depicted person – that's the term that they use in the legislation – might consent to a deepfake, in which case there are no penalties or consequences.

4:30

In what world? What does this government know? What does the sponsor of Bill 23, the Minister of Justice and the MLA for Calgary-Cross – what is he expecting? What is he expecting in the future where a person would consent to a deepfake, that it would be shared, disseminated? A political leader, a candidate, an MLA, a minister: there's quite an extensive list of individuals who are now going to be subject to the deepfake portion of this legislation. In what world are we signing off and saying that there will come a time when those deepfakes can be consensual and that they can be circulated and shared widely ahead of an election, for example? I'm just not sure what the minister is seeing in his crystal ball to suggest that there will be a world in which that is going to be acceptable for the depicted person, the real-life depicted person, and for the constituents that they may eventually represent.

Indeed, deepfakes are a major, major issue. I want to see something even more robust for just general Albertans, people who are not involved in politics or in elections, to have the integrity of their online identity protected because we know that this is something that is absolutely insidious. It is growing. It victimizes particularly girls and women, and it can be used as a form of coercion and control. It can be used as a form of domestic violence. I'm baffled about why there would be this small insertion in this legislation in regard to deepfakes that in the context of when they might be consensual, that would be okay, that everybody in this room is okay knowing that they could be the depicted person whose image is circulated in a way that is created by technology, but if it's consensual, then we would all be okay with that.

I really just wanted to raise my initial flags about Bill 23. I reckon we are going to have more conversation in these Chambers about this. The changes to the Citizen Initiative Act, the changes to timelines, that petitions can't happen 12 months before an election or 12 months after, a whole bunch of new processes around how we

verify signatures, do not change the fact, two truths, that the amendments up until this point have made it far, far, far more easy for a separatist movement to gain traction and attention in this province and especially with this government, and two, it does not change the ruling from the courts just last week that it is clear that the judges are taking very seriously the threat to our treaty obligations with First Nations people in this province as a result of the stoking of separatist interests from this government.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to speak? I see none.

The hon. Minister of Justice has an opportunity to close debate. That's waived.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

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

Bill 18

Safeguards for Last Resort Termination of Life Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? I will recognize the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I do have some comments, and I also have certain amendments that I would move at an appropriate time. We have said quite clearly about this bill that insofar as this bill addresses the concerns raised by the disability community with respect to the track 2 MAID, we do support the community. We do support their advocacy. But when we look at the bill as a whole, this bill does many other things that this government didn't tell the disability community at least. In the name of that community this government is making significant – significant – changes to MAID legislation. Frankly, the government is misleading Albertans that the only purpose this bill serves is to address the concerns of Alberta's disability community.

I will move certain amendments, and I will start with one that deals with certain sections of the bill that have provisions with respect to the physicians and providers of MAID. I have the requisite number of copies.

The Deputy Chair: Members, this will be referred to as amendment A1.

The member may proceed with introducing it.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall to move that Bill 18, Safeguards for Last Resort Termination of Life Act, be amended by (a) striking out section 5(2)(b) and (b) in section 14(c) by adding "or" to the end of subclause (i) and striking out subclause (iii).

As I said, Mr. Chair, this bill: I'm not sure if it even addresses the disability community's concerns fully, but it does many other things. One of those things is that it puts significant limitations, directions for physicians on what they can and cannot do. Every time this government does something to tell health professionals or any professionals what they can and what they cannot do, I guess it raises alarms. Health decisions are better left to the health professionals and not politicians.

The bill, essentially, requires practitioners to reach out to other practitioners who have acted as the primary care providers for the individual who is seeking MAID. I think, had government talked to some professionals, they would tell them that medical professionals are governed by a professional college which has a reputation of managing those professionals to the highest standard and in the public interest. They do have a code of conduct, code of ethics to adhere to, and they use their professional judgment, clinical judgment, in making decisions in a particular case. Every MAID request will vary. Every circumstance of MAID will vary.

4:40

This government telling practitioners what to do doesn't make sense. I think that needs to be left to the professionals and their college to decide what they can, what they should do and how they should proceed. I think it's completely unnecessary and will create unreasonable delays to some time-sensitive decisions.

The way MAID works is that it cannot take place in Alberta unless there are two independent medical professionals to sign off MAID, and this is reasonable. That's the national standard. That's how every other province does it. I do not believe that professionals in Alberta need UCP government advice on how to do their job. I think the pre-existing safeguards to independent professionals' opinions within a certain time frame are enough to protect individuals seeking MAID. They do not need the opinion of primary care providers if they have some other competent professional giving an independent opinion.

I think, in short, this provision doesn't help anything that the government claims. This provision doesn't help Albertans with disabilities. That was not their concern. This is just an unnecessary and unreasonable provision that will cause delays in time-sensitive matters. Decisions of physicians, professionals should be left to the physicians and their college to decide, not the government, so I urge all members to support this amendment. It will make the bill a little bit better.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Any others wishing to provide comment? I will recognize the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Pleased to speak to the proposed amendment put forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. The proposed amendment seeks to strike out a section of Bill 18 that requires MAID assessors to contact the family physician of the patient that is seeking MAID, using reasonable efforts to find out some information about that patient. That is not a government decision. That is bare medical due diligence. Any MAID assessor who is contacted by an individual here in Alberta should at the very minimum speak to somebody who that individual was getting medical attention from – a family physician, a primary care provider, anybody – to get a little background before assessing MAID.

Mr. Chair, when we introduced this bill, we had with us Dr. Ramona Coelho, who's an Ontario family physician who sits on the Ontario MAID Death Review Committee. Some of the reasons that she identified for MAID that individuals sought were things like loneliness, depression, poverty. These are the types of things that people in Ontario are seeking MAID for, and that, in our view, Mr. Chair, is unacceptable.

We know about a very prominent case, but we know about countless other cases. The prominent case I want to talk to you about is an Ontario case of a 26-year-old young man who had diabetes and who had depression who sought MAID in Ontario multiple times and was denied multiple times and instead went over

to British Columbia, where he sought an assessment and was granted MAID.

Now, had a provision like this existed in the B.C. legislation or perhaps even in the Ontario legislation, the doctor that granted MAID would have been compelled and required to look at that individual's medical history or speak to that individual's medical practitioner to find out what was going on. That is the bare minimum, in our view, of what should happen. To suggest that shouldn't be happening or that it's inappropriate is simply absurd, Mr. Chair.

I would strongly recommend that this Legislature vote down this amendment for the well-being and for the safety and for the protection of those seeking MAID. It is essential that anybody assessing a patient for MAID do the bare minimum. Speak to the family physician. Look at the medical records. Do what needs to be done to make sure that decision is being made with all of the appropriate information. To strike this section out would be simply negligent, and I would encourage everybody to vote against it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any others wishing to provide comment? Seeing none.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Back on the main bill. Any other comments? The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Again, this bill deals with some very sensitive issues, and I think the safeguards that exist in this process with respect to physicians were that there will be two independent assessments, and those people, those professionals, are governed by certain ethical standards, guidelines, and a professional college. Suggesting that they were not doing their job: that's what is absurd.

With that, I will move another amendment. I have the requisite copies to share with you.

The Deputy Chair: Amendment A2. The member may proceed.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall to move that Bill 18, Safeguards for Last Resort Termination of Life Act, be amended by striking out sections 10 and 11(1)(b)(iii).

They said that when the government introduced this bill, the government made it all about the disability community and their concerns, and it turned out that was not the case. I think if the government was really to help Alberta's disability community, they would work on and address many conditions that the disability community advocates think are leading some of the members of the disability community to access MAID track 2.

4:50

When we look at this government's record, this government has been called upon by many to bring forward accessibility legislation, and every single time they have refused to implement that legislation. In fact, Alberta is the only province that doesn't have that legislation. My colleague from St. Albert brought forward a private member's bill, again, bringing some changes and making sure that an accessibility framework is available for Albertans with disabilities in Alberta. Again, they refused.

Then the federal government came up with some disability supports, \$200, and Alberta became the only government that started clawing back those supports from Albertans with disabilities. Then they've made changes to the disability program. That also resulted in another \$200 cut to Albertans with disabilities. If the government really wants to address disability community

concerns, it's incumbent on them that they do create those opportunities where Albertans with disabilities can live a life of dignity and they do have decent means to live that life. Again, that government didn't do it, but in the name of supporting the disability community, they tried to sneak many other changes in this piece of legislation.

One of those changes is that they are putting a gag order on physicians that they should not be able to talk about MAID or those options with their patients. I think that, again, the government is trying to insert itself in a doctor-patient relationship that should be left for doctor and patient. If they have any concerns about any physician, that somehow they're not complying with or upholding the ethical standards, they are not upholding the standards set for them by the College of Physicians & Surgeons, I think that would be the place to go.

[Mr. Rowswell in the chair]

Government, like Albertans, could raise those concerns with respect to individual physicians, but government stepping into that relationship and telling doctors what they can and what they cannot discuss with their patient: I think that's interference in that relationship. I think that's also not something that people were asking for. No one in the medical community supports that.

The process that exists now: physicians are required to get informed consent from their patients. Part of that consent includes patient knowledge of the available options. Here the government is restricting a physician's ability from discussing MAID as an option. With that, I think every person seeking MAID is differently situated, and on a case-by-case basis physicians and professionals are better situated to make that assessment, to make that judgment, not the government.

The government has certainly tried to insert itself in the doctor-patient relationship before. Again, as a matter of principle we strongly oppose the government inserting itself in that relationship. It violates the core principles of their professional autonomy and sets a dangerous precedent for future health care access decisions in our province. I think the government needs to trust physicians. The government needs to trust the body that regulates physicians and needs to work with the professionals instead of inserting themselves with the dint of law into places where they don't belong.

With that, I urge all members of this Legislature to rise above your personal opinion on politics, think from the point of view of those who are seeking this service, those who are providing this service, and make a decision that is in the interest of the public and not your political base. With that, I urge everyone to consider supporting this amendment.

The Acting Chair: Are there others that would like to speak? The Minister of Justice. Go ahead.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall for bringing forward this amendment. This is a section, that the member is seeking to amend, that deals with the display or advertising or potentially the encouragement of MAID services here in the province of Alberta. That is something that we've heard from advocates all across the province and indeed across the country that we think is inappropriate. We know that the topic of MAID is extremely sensitive. We know that it is personal. I think that's something that the hon. member and I very much agree on. Those that are eligible for MAID under the federal framework and subsequently under the parameters established by Bill 18 need to be supported in every way possible. In particular, when I speak about

the supports for Albertans, that is even heightened or enhanced when we talk about vulnerable Albertans.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Now, Albertans should never be coerced, influenced, pressured, or even encouraged by advertisements, by displays, by booths, by information, or brochures, Mr. Chair. Nothing in Bill 18 prevents a doctor from speaking with his or her patient when it comes to MAID. What Bill 18 is seeking to do is to prevent and block activists from promoting or encouraging MAID to vulnerable Albertans.

We know from the support that we've received for Bill 18 that it is supported by advocacy groups all across this country. We had in this very Chamber, when we tabled Bill 18, a number of groups from all across the country. We had Inclusion Alberta, Inclusion Canada. We have the support of groups like Indigenous Disability Canada, the Alberta Centre for Suicide Prevention, the Canadian Mental Health Association, and, of course, the Disabled Women's Network of Canada as being some of the many disability advocates that strongly support the provisions of Bill 18.

Mr. Chair, this amendment would remove the ban that Bill 18 seeks to impose upon the advertisement or encouragement or activism towards vulnerable Albertans by doctors, by facilities that might encourage MAID. It is a personal decision that a patient should seek with his or her doctor. Bill 18 would ensure that undue pressure, undue influence, and perhaps even coercion never happens here in this province. For that reason and for those reasons, I would encourage all members to vote against this amendment as well.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other comments on amendment A2? Seeing none.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Back on the main bill. Are there any other comments, questions, or amendments? Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think that's the go-to line for the government. Whenever they disagree with anyone's approach, they label them as activists. Before it was for judges, that if they disagreed with their decision, they would label them as activist judges. And now somehow doctors doing their jobs, if they offer MAID as an option, will be labelled as activist doctors. That is quite shameful.

With that, I do have another amendment and the requisite number of copies.

5:00

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we will refer to this amendment as A3.

The member may proceed.

Mr. Sabir: The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall to move that Bill 18, Safeguards for Last Resort Termination of Life Act, be amended as follows: (a) by striking out sections 1(1)(b), 13, and 14(f) and (g); (b) by striking out the title of part 4 and substituting "Regulations."

What this provision does: it deals with the care co-ordination service that has been created by this act. This service will rest in the minister's office. Again, the ministry is trying to insert itself into health decisions and taking on additional responsibility of managing people's care through this care co-ordination service. This is an overreach, and it's also completely unnecessary. Alberta

Health Services already has a MAID care co-ordination service led by professionals, managed by professionals, not politicians. It's completely unclear why government thinks that they need to have that office in the minister's office. Health care providers are equipped with the necessary oversight through pre-existing regulatory bodies like the College of Physicians & Surgeons. As well, Health Canada currently oversees the Canadian association of MAID assessors course as well.

There is no reason for a care co-ordination office in the minister's office because a care co-ordination office exists in Alberta Health Services. There is another reason why that Alberta Health Services care co-ordination office is better. The professionals are managing it, doctors are engaged in it, and those people are accountable to their respective colleges. Taking this office into the minister's office, who has declared himself immune from his professional regulatory organization, doesn't believe in the rule of law for himself, I think is unacceptable.

That decision should be left for health professionals. As it exists now under Alberta Health Services, that is completely unnecessary, to give a minister and this government more power to regulate Albertans' health. It's a matter of death and life as these are death and life decisions. We cannot and Albertans will not stand for political interference in those decisions.

I urge all members to stand against this concentration of power and this unnecessary overreach of government into people's health care decisions and vote for this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Any comments referring to amendment A3? The Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you to the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall for introducing another amendment, seeking to remove the reference in Bill 18 to the care co-ordination service. The purpose of the care co-ordination service is to provide oversight, accountability, and transparency on the decisions being made and whether MAID is being delivered in an appropriate manner here in this province. Ontario has the Ontario MAID Death Review Committee. Alberta will have the care co-ordination service, and that will consist of professionals, people who are tasked with looking at the actions, the processes, the procedures, and decisions when it comes to making sure that MAID is operating properly in this province.

Now, oversight, accountability, and transparency are non-negotiables, especially when it comes to MAID, Mr. Chair. There are no do-overs, there are no second chances, and there's no room for mistakes. That's why the care co-ordination service is the only way and the most essential way that we will ensure that the delivery of MAID is done properly here in this province.

Why wouldn't anybody advocate to have some layer of accountability and transparency and an oversight board looking at the decisions being made in this incredibly important and sensitive area? I have no idea, and because of that, Mr. Chair, I cannot support this amendment. I would encourage all members of this Chamber, if they value the oversight, if they value accountability, and if they value transparency and making sure that MAID provision and assessments are done properly in this province, to support a care co-ordination service to make sure that that is actually happening each and every time.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Any other comments with regard to amendment A3? Seeing none.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are back on the main bill. Any comments, questions, or further amendments? I have the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. At this time as the Deputy Government House Leader I move that the committee rise and report progress on Bill 18.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Mrs. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 18. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading (continued)

Bill 25

An Act to Remove Politics and Ideology from Classrooms and Amend the Education Act, 2026

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

Mr. Nicolaidis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to stand today to move second reading of Bill 25, An Act to Remove Politics and Ideology from Classrooms and Amend the Education Act, 2026.

5:10

The bill will make sure that our schools are places where students are taught how to think, not what to think. It is a bill rooted in the fundamental belief that our schools must be sanctuaries of learning, places where the pursuit of academic excellence is never overshadowed by the prevailing political winds of the day.

To understand why this bill is necessary, we must first look at the current state of our educational landscape. For years we have seen a gradual but persistent shift in the mission of our schools. What was once a system dedicated almost exclusively to literacy, numeracy, citizenship, and preparing young people for workforce has become increasingly cluttered. Today many of our school boards are becoming increasingly distracted with other priorities such as developing DEI action plans and reacting to the latest progressive trends. Many of our school boards, for example, fund diversity and inclusion departments when our education system needs more teachers, more educational assistants, and other professionals.

[The Speaker in the chair]

One board, for example, employs an antiracism and equity team that consists of specialized diversity consultants who facilitate circle practices and conversations regarding perceived systemic barriers. At the same time at that very school division about 30 per cent of kids in grades 1 to 3 have been flagged as being below grade level in reading and math.

Parents across the province from urban centres to our rural heartlands have raised their voices in concern. They are not asking for much. They are simply asking that when they send their children to school, those children are taught, again, how to think and not taught what to think. They want to know that the limited hours of the school day are being used to build the foundational skills that will allow their children to succeed in a competitive global economy.

The first major component of Bill 25 focuses on the restoration of academic focus. There is a wealth of research and evidence from high-performing jurisdictions around the world which shows that when a school system maintains a rigorous focus on core competencies, student outcomes improve across the board. By contrast, when that focus is diluted by ideology, it is the students who suffer. This bill mandates that the provincial curriculum be implemented with a high degree of intellectual integrity. This means that the primary metric for success in our classrooms will once again be the mastery of subject matter. We are ensuring that the time of both the teacher and the student is protected from other activities that do not directly contribute to educational outcomes.

We must also address the concept of institutional neutrality, which is a cornerstone of the legislation. Now, I've heard some critics who have suggested that neutrality is somehow a retreat from reality or an attempt to ignore the social issues of our time, but this is a fundamental misunderstanding of the role of public institutions in a pluralistic democracy. In a society as diverse as ours it is not the role of a school to decide which political or social ideologies are correct or acceptable. Rather, the role of the school is to provide students with the intellectual tools to evaluate those ideas for themselves. When a school authority takes an official stance on a controversial matter, it creates an environment where students who hold different views may feel marginalized or silenced. This is the opposite of inclusion. By requiring institutional neutrality, Bill 25 ensures that every student, regardless of their beliefs, feels welcome and respected in our public schools. Furthermore, Bill 25 will prohibit school boards from issuing statements or taking official positions on potentially divisive social or political causes.

This bill brings a much-needed sense of order to the symbols as well as displays within our schools. Mr. Speaker, symbols are powerful, and they should be used to unite us rather than divide us. The Canadian flag and our provincial flag are symbols that belong to every single person in this province. They represent our shared history, our common laws, and our collective future, and by establishing these as primary symbols of our educational institutions, we are reinforcing a sense of national and provincial identity that transcends individual affiliations. This is not about exclusion; it's about finding the common ground that allows a diverse population to live and learn together in harmony.

Mr. Speaker, I have indeed heard some criticism regarding the bill, which I would like to address directly. For example, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association has argued that the legislation risks narrowing the space for open inquiry and critical thinking. Regrettably, their criticism is unfounded. There is nothing in the bill that would narrow the space for open inquiry or critical thinking. In fact, the bill does the complete opposite and creates more space for dialogue. For example, right on page 2 of the bill we amend section 16 of the act, and we create a new section specifically devoted to intellectual diversity. In this section we propose to enshrine into law the requirement for our education system to "encourage a wide range of perspectives and ideas, foster critical thinking, and foster the acquisition of knowledge and skills."

The bill also makes amendments to section 33 of the Education Act. Section 33 outlines the responsibilities of school boards. Bill

25 will make it a responsibility for our school boards to "ensure that each student enrolled in a school operated by the board is free to express any perspective or idea at school in a manner that complies with the code of conduct." Our goal here is simple: to ensure that students can express diverging views and opinions without fear of reprisal. Critical thinking cannot happen in a vacuum where only one set of ideas is permitted. Critical thinking requires intellectual friction. By mandating that boards ensure that students are free to express any perspective, the law protects the rights of students to challenge the status quo, question prevailing narratives, and introduce counterpoints.

Research into cognitive development shows that when students are exposed to competing viewpoints, they are forced to move beyond simple memorization and instead engage in synthesis, evaluation, and logical deduction. This provision ensures that the classroom remains a marketplace of ideas where the strength of an argument is tested by its ability to stand up to scrutiny. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, one of the greatest enemies of critical thinking is ideological conformity.

If a student feels that expressing an unpopular idea will result in an academic or social penalization, they will naturally self-censor. Self-censorship is the death of critical inquiry because it prevents the brain from exploring the logical boundaries of a concept. By making it a board responsibility to protect this freedom of expression, Bill 25 creates a safety net for the inquisitive mind. It tells the student that their role is not to parrot the instructor but to analyze information independently and articulate their findings without fear of any kind of reprisal.

I've also heard some criticism from the Alberta Teachers' Association, who have said that this bill is a solution in search of a problem. However, the evidence from parents and concerned citizens tells a very different story. We have seen numerous instances where schools have been used as vehicles to promote social or political causes. I've heard directly from parents who feel that their primary role as the moral and social guides for their children is being undermined. These are not isolated incidents; they represent a systemic drift that requires legislative correction. By enshrining these new standards in the Education Act, we are providing a clear and enforceable framework that removes the ambiguity currently facing schools.

This leads us to the vital issue of parental rights. The government has always maintained that parents are the first and most important teachers in a child's life. The school system exists to support parents and not to replace them. That is why Bill 25 introduces several measures to ensure that parents are kept informed and involved in their children's education. This includes a new requirement for school authorities to develop transparent processes and policies for meaningful parental involvement.

I'd also like to shift gears and talk about the protection of our educators. Over the last several months I've heard loud and clear from teachers that violence and aggression in the classroom is a growing problem, and Bill 25 responds directly to their concerns by making amendments to section 31 of the Education Act. Section 31 outlines the responsibilities of students, and here we are adding a requirement that students must "refrain from engaging in violence of any kind at school during school-related activities."

In addition, we have replaced the requirement of school boards, parents, and students to create "welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments" with "a safe and caring environment that fosters and maintains respectful and responsible behaviours." The shift in language from the previous phrasing to the new standard is a deliberate move towards legal clarity and the promotion of personal accountability within the school system. While the previous wording was often viewed as aspirational and broad, the new language is

designed to be more precise, enforceable, and focused on the tangible actions of individuals within the education community. By leading with “a safe and caring environment,” the amendment prioritizes physical and psychological security as a foundational requirement for education.

5:20

Of course, the removal of “welcoming” does not imply that schools should be cold or invite hostility. Rather, it acknowledges that the primary duty of a school board is to ensure safety and order so that learning can occur and so that teachers and other educators can be safe. In the context of the broader bill, which addresses violence and aggression, this change aligns the overarching mission of the school board with the practical need to maintain a disciplined environment where students are protected from disruption and harm.

Mr. Speaker, I’d now like to turn attention to the amendments that are outlined on page 19 of the bill. Here we are adding new responsibilities to school boards. We are directing school boards to ensure that students receive reading and math supports when universal screeners have flagged them as requiring support. This will make sure the student can develop and acquire ability and knowledge in literacy and numeracy. This amendment is the cornerstone of our commitment to an evidence-based education and to student success. It transforms the role of school boards from simply providing access to education to being legally accountable for the specific academic outcomes of our most vulnerable learners.

Research has consistently shown that the window between kindergarten and grade 3 is, without question, the most critical period of cognitive development in literacy and numeracy. Students who do not reach grade-level proficiency by the end of grade 3 are statistically much more likely to struggle throughout their entire academic career, facing higher dropout rates, and they also subsequently experience limited economic opportunities in adulthood. By mandating that school boards provide targeted supports as soon as a universal screener identifies a deficit, we are ensuring that no child is allowed to fall through the cracks during these important, formative years. This is about moving from a wait-to-fail model to a proactive success model.

As we move forward with this legislation, Mr. Speaker, it’s important to remember the ultimate goal. We want our province to continue to have the best education system in the world. We want our graduates to be capable, confident, and prepared for whatever path they choose in life, and to achieve that, we must ensure that our schools stay true to their core mission. We must protect them from distractions of political polarization and ensure that they remain focused on the academic and personal growth of every student.

The historical context of education in this country is one of partnership. It is a partnership between school and the family, but somewhere along the way that partnership has become unbalanced and strained. The school system has in some cases begun to assert a level of moral and ideological authority that belongs properly to the family. Bill 25 is a recalibration of that partnership. It asserts that, indeed, while schools have a legitimate role in setting academic standards and ensuring safety of students, they do not have a mandate to shape the private beliefs and values of the next generation. That is a responsibility that must remain with parents. By clearly defining the boundaries of what is appropriate for a public school, we are strengthening the public school system.

Furthermore, when parents see their children being exposed to materials or ideas that they may find objectionable or concerning, they may feel that their concerns are being dismissed, and trust may be eroded. By creating a transparent and predictable framework,

Bill 25 allows that trust to be rebuilt. It provides a common set of rules that everybody can understand and follow.

As well, we must also consider the economic implications of our education system. In an increasingly complex and technological world the cost of educational failure is higher than ever before. If our students graduate without a mastery of math or the ability to read or write at a high level, they will be permanently disadvantaged. They will struggle to find meaningful work and contribute to the prosperity of our province. By focusing our schools on these essential skills, we are making an investment in our future economic stability. We are ensuring that they will be ready for the challenges of the 21st century.

To those who argue that this bill is divisive, I would say that the status quo is what is divisive. The lack of clarity has led to endless debates and conflicts when we must be focused on academic success. It has left parents feeling frustrated and ignored. Bill 25 provides a resolution to these conflicts by establishing clear provincial standards. It takes the politics out of the school board office and puts the focus back on the student. It provides a way forward that is based on the shared values of excellence, neutrality, and parental rights. The language of the bill is carefully crafted to be both firm and fair. It provides clear expectations for school boards and students. It also includes mechanisms for oversight and accountability so that parents can be confident in outcomes.

Mr. Speaker, we often talk about the importance of preparing students for citizenship. What does it mean ultimately to be a good citizen? It means being able to participate in a democratic society, to engage with people who have different views, and to make informed decisions about the future. None of these things are possible if students are shielded from that diversity. By requiring balance and objectivity, Bill 25 is promoting a higher form of citizenship. It is teaching students how to engage in the democratic process in a respectful and productive way.

As we begin second reading, I ask all members of the Assembly to think about the long-term impact of our decisions today. Mr. Speaker, we can continue down the path of increasing polarization and ideological conflict in our schools, or we can choose a different path, a path that prioritizes the needs of the student, the rights of parents, and the integrity of the educator. We can choose a path that leads to excellence and harmony, and Bill 25 is that path. I’m confident that when we look back on this day, we’ll see it as a turning point in our education system. We’ll see it as a moment when we decided to put the focus back where it belongs, on the academic and personal growth of our children.

I want to thank the many parents, teachers, and other leaders who have helped to provide their input and commentary to support the development of this bill.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I’m pleased, once again, to move second reading of Bill 25 and ask all members to offer their support. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: On second reading of Bill 25, the hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington.

Ms Chapman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’ll admit that I’m a little confused by some of the things I just heard the minister say. It seems that he wants to have it both ways. I have been in this Chamber and many times listened to the minister tell us how very excellent, particularly on academics, Alberta’s curriculum and Alberta students are. How many times have we heard the minister quote test results or results from PISA to make the case about just how excellent Alberta students perform when it comes to academics? So to listen to the minister come in here now, do a complete about-face on that, and tell us that, no, actually PISA

doesn't matter – interesting take from this minister – and that our students are not achieving academic excellence kind of threw me a little bit.

Bill 25, that we have in front of us, an act to remove politics and ideology from classrooms, the minister claims will strengthen school safety, improve school board accountability, and keep the focus on teaching the fundamentals like reading, math, and science. Now, let's be clear what Bill 25 is actually about. The bulk of this bill is simply centralizing power in the office of the minister of education, and this power runs the gamut: everything from deciding the flags that get to be shown at school all the way to setting priorities in education, something that used to be the purview of our locally elected and autonomous school boards. Yesterday the minister of education said that it was baseless that he wants to eliminate school boards, and I believe him on that. After all, why go through all the fuss and bother of removing school boards when you can just take away all of their authority, power, responsibility? Much cleaner.

Now, when it comes to teaching fundamentals, something that I heard the minister mention several times in his comments, parents – the parents that sit among us in this Chamber, parents that I talk to, parents that are engaging with their children's education, who are cultivating a relationship with teachers, who read the 10,000 e-mails that come from your kids' school every year – know that the vast majority of our kids' school days are spent on literacy and numeracy. Without question, that is the focus for the entirety of the K to 12 education.

5:30

For the minister to suggest otherwise – there's a word that the members opposite throw around a lot, so for the government to suggest that our schools are not teaching, are not having a focus on literacy and numeracy, is best described as fearmongering. This government is fearmongering. It's a completely disingenuous suggestion that our schools are not focused on literacy and numeracy. It's a completely disingenuous suggestion that teachers aren't governed by a code of conduct already that requires neutrality and impartiality in the classroom.

I have a number of questions on specific clauses in the bill that I'd like to get to, but to start more broadly, I am hoping that the minister will be able to provide some clarity, because he has been asked a few times and I haven't yet heard an answer when we are talking about this concept of neutrality. It is important, Mr. Speaker. Of course it's important that our teachers approach their lessons in a way that is free from personal bias and in a way that reflects the neutrality that parents expect in the classroom, but how far exactly are we taking this concept? Will teachers be required to teach both sides of slavery? If so, if the minister could please clarify, because I think that we all know what the downsides of slavery are, but what would be the positive aspects of slavery that a teacher would now be required to teach to students to prove that they are impartial when it comes to slavery?

I could ask the same question about genocide, about all of the really horrible things about human history, Mr. Speaker, and we know that there are many of those things. How far are we taking this concept of neutrality? Teachers: we learn about the Holodomor. Is there an upside to the Holodomor? Was there an upside to that? Is that something teachers are going to be required to teach to children? I am not trying to be disingenuous in asking this question, Mr. Speaker. I really need the minister to help us understand how a teacher is meant to teach both sides of slavery. Teachers need to understand this, too, because they are so confused as to what is being asked of them right now.

Okay. Let's go into specific clauses. We start with the preamble, where we are removing "welcoming, caring, respectful and safe

learning environments that respect diversity and nurture a sense of belonging and a positive sense of self." Now, we're subbing in some new words instead. We've got "safe and caring environment that fosters and maintains respectful and responsible behaviours." In a way, we're just kind of moving words around in here, but there are still questions, I think, about removing the word "welcoming". Given how many times the minister said the word "diversity" in his introduction of this bill, why we are removing the concept of a respect for diversity in the classroom – not just in the preamble in the bill; it cleans that language out about eight or nine times in the bill.

I think the particular reason for flagging a concern around this, of course, is because this government has signalled that changes are coming to the model for inclusive education in our schools. Without question, that is something that is necessary, Mr. Speaker. The regulations as they exist now, I think, are about 20 years old. Obviously, the modern classroom has changed, so we know that we need an update to that, but there is a lot of concern, particularly in the disability community, that perhaps this is not the government that they would trust to make those changes to the inclusion model. So when we are removing a word like "welcoming" from our Education Act, this is why it is raising red flags for this community.

I had a teacher write to me, Marlo. Marlo writes:

What is wrong with welcoming? What is wrong with diversity?

What is wrong with feeling a sense of belonging and having a positive sense of self?

Do you realize a large part of teaching is forming relationships with students? Students need to feel safe, like they belong, and [are] welcomed in our schools and classrooms. This is a huge part of learning.

Marlo goes on to ask the minister if he might not have more important issues in education to attend to rather than rewriting the preamble in the Education Act, that there are many issues he would think would take more precedence such as violence in classrooms or the horrifying lack of teachers, a result, of course, of this government's failure to hire the number of teachers that we actually need in our system.

I think that when we are thinking about the disability community and concerns about how welcoming or not welcoming our schools are, the Premier has made this comment several times, and I am hoping that the minister can provide some clarification. The comment is, quote, students can earn their way into and out of a classroom. End quote.

This was a new concept for me, that students earned their way into a classroom. I have always thought of education as a right for every citizen. Certainly, when you attend a public school, you don't have to earn your way into anything. You are provided with an education regardless of the need that you have.

If the minister would be able to clarify or elaborate on exactly what it is that the Premier means when she says that a student can earn their way into or out of a classroom. This is extra concerning when we are removing words like "welcoming." Who exactly are the students we are talking about who are going to earn their way out of a classroom under the tenure of this government?

The next section in the bill has some change in language around courses or programs of studies. They must "encourage a wide range of perspectives and ideas." Great. That already happens at school. They must "foster critical thinking." Awesome. Teachers do that literally every day. "Foster the acquisition of knowledge in schools." Yes; we're just describing what school is at this point.

I understand if the minister has to write it down to feel comfortable. That's fine, but let's not pretend that what is written here is any different from what is already happening in the classroom every single day. I have never talked to a single teacher who is not deeply invested in their students developing the capacity for critical

thinking. That is 100 per cent at the forefront of what is happening in our schools.

I want to address the changes in section 31. Now, the minister referred to the changes in section 31. This is the section of the Education Act on student responsibilities. This is the minister's answer to violence in schools. The answer is probably the most clear illustration I could have asked for to show that the minister does not understand why we are having an issue with violence in our schools.

This adds a section to the student code of conduct that students "refrain from engaging in violence of any kind at school and during school-related activities." Chat, we are cooked if this is what a government thinks is going to address violence in schools. Are you serious that we think K to 12 students are sitting down and reading the Education Act, any section of it, literally any section of it?

5:40

I have three tiny nerds in my household, and I asked them: how many of you are familiar with your student code of conduct? None of them, okay? They know the basics because they've been learning the basics since kindergarten. It's their teachers who have taught them that the way to behave at school is in a manner that is respectful of others, the capacity to set some boundaries around your own comfort levels, right?

But, obviously, children know intellectually that they should not be violent at schools. This doesn't address why violence is occurring. The reason that violence is occurring comes right back to classroom conditions. What is happening is that we have a whole bunch of kids who are stuffed into a classroom that is too small to accommodate that number of kids. Those kids increasingly, because these are modern classrooms, have a lot of needs that are not being met.

Now, this government loves to go on about whatever their education budget is this year. But what they don't love is to admit the fact that for many years they funded this education system below growth, so below inflation and population growth. That is a choice that was a choice for this government to make. I'm not sure why they don't stand proudly behind that choice. They wanted to spend less on education and, by gosh, they spent less on education. But the consequence of that choice is what is happening in our classrooms, where we have kids who are completely overwhelmed by the physical environment, who are not getting the support they need to actually and actively participate in the classroom in a healthy way. Changing a student code of conduct will do absolutely nothing to address the pressures that are causing the violence and therefore will do nothing to address the violence in classrooms.

Oh, I would point out, too, section 37 in the Education Act already provides the authority for schools to discipline a student whose conduct is "injurious to the physical [and] mental well-being of others in the school." So this doesn't add any additional powers for schools or school boards to manage a situation where we do have a violent student. Language already exists in the Education Act around violence and injury to others. This will change absolutely nothing.

An Hon. Member: Why are you opposed?

Ms Chapman: Okay, so section 33 – I'm sorry. I heard a member chirp something, but I'm actually not great at talking and listening at the same time. I think the question was: why are you opposed? The opposition is super clear, Mr. Speaker. I'm opposed because this doesn't solve the problem. For someone to walk out here and suggest that words written on a piece of paper, that you can write a piece of legislation that tells students not to be violent at school and

that is going to do anything is insulting, okay? It's insulting to me. It's insulting to all Albertans to suggest that you are addressing violence in schools by putting one sentence in the Education Act. It's utterly ridiculous.

Now let's move on to section 33, board responsibilities. I have a number of questions for the minister in this section. The first is subsection clause (a.1), "implement and continuously monitor the delivery of courses or programs of study prescribed, approved or authorized under this Act." My question to the minister is: how is this different from what is happening now for school boards? How will school boards change, augment existing monitoring that is happening? How is the ministry tracking and following outcomes of the monitoring and reporting that school boards are required to do around this clause?

Section (a.2), "ensure that the courses or programs of study offered at a school operated by the board are focused on academic rigour, intellectual integrity and essential knowledge." If the minister could please provide any kind of evidence to know that this isn't currently happening. Again, those PISA scores come up all the time, so I was under the impression, if I had only been listening to the minister, that our schools were great, our students are great, and everyone is achieving at top levels in the world. Where is the evidence to show that this isn't happening, and how will the minister be measuring success when it comes to this outcome?

Clause (b.1). This one is just, honestly, kind of a little bit of a personal bugaboo. "Establish and implement methods that facilitate the meaningful involvement of parents in student learning and decisions respecting non-instructional school activities." Is it not enough that I know that my child is in the chess club at school, or must I be subjected to a play-by-play of every match that he does as a part of that club? There's no clarity for me here on what meaningful involvement is.

I have three children in three different public schools, Mr. Speaker, and I can tell you that I am drowning in engagement from my kids' schools. If I leave my inbox for a week, I come back to somewhere between 20 and 30 e-mails from my kids' schools about literally everything that they're doing: about what unit they're doing in PE that week, about what clubs are being offered by teachers on their lunch break, what sports teams are being coached by teachers before and after the school day starts and on weekends for tournaments, about upcoming events and fun lunches and everything that they're doing in math and science and humanities. It is a never-ending barrage of information about what is happening in my kids' school days, and every single e-mail ends with: please reach out if you want to know more. If I want to know more? It's enough. I know enough.

Schools and teachers are not hiding what's happening in the classroom, Mr. Speaker. They are desperate for parents to engage. I have been . . . [Ms Chapman's speaking time expired] Oh, gosh. I didn't even get halfway through.

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

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Happy to rise and talk about Bill 25. I'll begin with a quote from Democracy Without Borders. They tell us, "A well-educated population is the bedrock of democracy."

Further, they say:

In an era marked by rapid technological advancements, geopolitical shifts, and pressing global challenges, education remains one of the strongest foundations of democratic society. [It] is not merely a tool for personal advancement but a public good that sustains the very fabric of governance.

But educational systems, Mr. Speaker, can also reflect when that foundation is running into a wee bit of difficulty. That is what we see in Bill 25, an educational system running into a wee bit of difficulty because it doesn't at all purport to fix the actual problems, as my colleague just talked about. It fixes problems, as the minister also referred to, that simply don't exist at the moment, looking for problems to solve instead of solving the actual problems that exist within a rather complex and complicated system on behalf of all the kids in Alberta.

It began with, in the lead-up to the bill, this government deciding to only consult with a small group of folks rather than the larger group of Albertans. While, of course, consultation is really important – you need to get those diverse perspectives – Mr. Speaker, here's my question to the government: if they're expecting teachers to be able to present in their classrooms diverse perspectives, why, then, are they afraid of diverse perspectives from Albertans?

They don't want to hear from teachers. They don't want to hear from parents, from the Alberta School Councils' Association, who, arguably, because they're parents like my colleague here, deal with their schools and their teachers and their kids every single day, and they see what goes on in a really fruitful manner. Why haven't they talked with those folks? Why haven't they talked with people from different communities that do not see themselves – and I'm worried that they won't see themselves – represented in our educational system? I would say that it's because they really don't want to.

My worry, Mr. Speaker, is that we're going to be faced with going back to what my educational foundations professor, Dr. Gow, said was the factory model of education, something that, although it might have taught a group of kids to read, didn't teach them enough to actually succeed in society. That wasn't the point. It was to provide literally that factory employee, an employee that wouldn't question, an employee that wouldn't push for something better, and I worry that we're going back there.

5:50

Further to that, again, what exactly does this bill actually solve? The minister has talked about the fact that the changes mean education is required to be impartial and free from personal bias. He's mentioned the word "ideology" more than once in reference to this. He talks about respect in classrooms. He talks about, as I just referenced, needing to hear different perspectives and that classrooms need to be places where conversations happen, but they're conversations kind of underpinned by respect. Of course, he's also referenced the importance of critical thinking. Well, of course. Every single teacher does this every single day, as my colleague also talked about, Mr. Speaker. It's an insult to them, an insult to kids, and an insult to what education is about, which is about putting the kids at the centre.

We don't want to just have, at the end of grade 12, robots. We want to have thinking – thinking – citizens. We want them to be able to make up their own minds about things, and that means that not only are those controversial issues discussed in the classroom in a safe way, Mr. Speaker, but they're discussed with some amount of moderation, simply if for no other reason than because of the huge preponderance of mis- and disinformation that abounds these days. We need that moderator to say: "Guess what. The *Titanic* actually did sink."

That's what we want our teachers there to be able to do, and teachers right now are feeling the chill of this bill before it's even gone out there into the world. They're feeling that chill because at their heart, their professional heart, they do not believe that this government respects the work that they do. They do not believe that

the government respects them as the professionals that they are, and this is a problem.

Of course, students need to be able to think critically, Mr. Speaker. I mean, the curriculum talks about it. There are competency progressions which exist alongside the curriculum. Teachers are required to assist students in terms of how to think critically. What that means is dialogue in the classroom. It means conversations. It means discussion. It means complex problem solving, but it also means having that teacher there as a mentor and having that teacher able to answer some of those complexities that the kids are grappling with at the moment. That complexity comes up in English language arts. It happens in social studies. It can even happen at recess while a kid has a moment to think about something and asks a question of a teacher.

We need to be able to trust teachers to be able to do their job. The problem is that teachers are feeling as if they can't because of the way in which this particular bill is structured and, quite frankly, some of the egregious – egregious – comments that the minister just made. Then those discussions will be lacking that mentorship and that facilitation and that guidance, quite frankly. Then discussions will simply descend into, like, a compass that isn't working. It'll be my side versus your side, and it'll be whoever is loudest is the one that wins rather than whoever actually maybe has the most thoughtful response to whatever issue it is that people might be discussing at the time.

The minister talked an awful lot about intellectual rigour and intellectual integrity, but you can't have that – these are kids we're talking about – without a safe space, Mr. Speaker, and that safe space, as my colleague talked about, is created together, teacher and students. Right now the classroom as we know it – because the word "safe" is out, because the word "belonging" is out. Regardless of what the minister says, these sorts of things and these words should be in the Education Act because, quite frankly, they set the tone for the way in which education is delivered to each and every student no matter where they start out or where they are in the middle of their education or, quite frankly, where it is they end up.

We teach with the child in mind. That's what every single teacher is expected to do. In my career, 24 years as a teacher, I have never known a teacher to not put the kids in their classroom first. That's what teachers do. They are professionals, Mr. Speaker. They are not only professionals, but they are bound by loads of codes of conduct. There's the teacher code of conduct. There's the teacher quality standard. There are the codes of conduct that exist that boards have already in place. There are all the rules that, together with the entirety of the classroom, they discuss and they implement and they live by every single day. Those five rules: be kind, be respectful, talk to each other, you know, do you need to say – whatever it happens to be. Those five rules. Every single classroom has them.

This is insulting to teachers. It's insulting not because they don't believe that intellectualism and intellectual rigour and curriculum isn't important. Of course, they do. It isn't because they don't think we shouldn't have kids who can think at the end of the day. Of course, they want kids to think. That's the centrepiece of it all. We want to have active and engaged citizens, but we're not going to have that if teachers don't feel as if they can at the very least moderate a discussion.

I'm here to tell you that – you know, I kind of wonder about what's going to happen to the high school curriculum because of this bill. But aside from all of that, all the discussions that I've had with kids throughout the years, Mr. Speaker: not all of them happened because I happened to be teaching a particular subject in social studies that day. Some of those discussions happened because this is what they came to school with because they and their parents had a discussion the night before. Quite frankly, that

discussion these days could indeed be about separatism. If you don't want a balanced discussion about separatism, this is the bill that won't give you that.

There are some issues we cannot and must not be neutral about. My colleague alluded to a few. Genocide: this is not a subject one can be neutral about. We can't teach the Holocaust and say that it was good and that there are both sides. We cannot teach the calls to action from the TRC and say that reconciliation – well, you know, that maybe residential schools had all these good things going for them. We cannot teach that slavery had good points. We can't. This bill requires teachers to do that. We're putting teachers in an absolutely untenable position. Is this the point of this bill, to put teachers in an untenable position and to not actually teach well? Is that the point of this bill? Is the point of this bill because this government really doesn't respect teachers? Is the point of this bill because we don't want education to actually reflect the realities of the year we are living in, which is 2026, not 1956? Is that the point of the bill? Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, that Norman Rockwell view of education never really existed.

Education has always been about putting kids at the centre. It has always been about having relationships with kids. It's always been about classrooms being safe spaces to talk about sometimes difficult issues. And it's always been about teachers shepherding kids through those things, teaching them how to have that discussion, teaching

them about the issues of the day in a moderated, safe environment. It has never been about taking over the job of parents. It's working alongside parents.

Like my colleague talked about, every week there was a Friday newsletter. Every single week. It wasn't just about: study these five spelling words. It was about: "This is what we've done. This is where we're going. Oh, and I need you to know about this field trip coming up." I do wonder, because it does talk in the act about these sorts of extracurricular things, what happens to field trips. Are we going to be allowed to have field trips? I know that the folks across will say: oh, she's fearmongering. I am not. This isn't about fearmongering. This is about questions that arise out of a bill that has issues, Mr. Speaker. One of the reasons it has issues is because the government won't consult with people who differ in perspective from them.

I urge all members of this House to vote against this bill. This does not serve our children.

The Speaker: It's 10 seconds to 6, so let's call it 6 o'clock. I think we can agree on that. As per Standing Order 4(2) the Assembly now stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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