



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature  
Second Session

# Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, April 21, 2026

Day 49

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

# Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

Second Session

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

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Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)  
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Brar, Gurtej Singh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)  
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Eggen, Hon. David, ECA, Edmonton-North West (NDP)  
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LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, ECA, Red Deer-North (UC)  
Loewen, Hon. Todd, ECA, Central Peace-Notley (UC)  
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Smith, Hon. Danielle, ECA, Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC),  
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Tejada, Lizette, Calgary-Klein (NDP)  
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Wilson, Hon. Rick D., ECA, Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)  
Wright, Justin, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UC),  
Government Whip  
Wright, Peggy K., Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)  
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),  
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Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)

## Party standings:

United Conservative: 47

New Democrat: 38

Progressive Tory: 1

Independent: 1

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Mickey Amery	Minister of Justice
Andrew Boitchenko	Minister of Tourism and Sport
Devin Dreeshen	Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors
Tanya Fir	Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women
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Nathan Neudorf	Minister of Affordability and Utilities
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R.J. Sigurdson	Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation
Searle Turton	Minister of Children and Family Services
Dan Williams	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Rick Wilson	Minister of Mental Health and Addiction
Muhammad Yaseen	Associate Minister of Multiculturalism

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Nolan Dyck	Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous and Rural Policing
Shane Getson	Parliamentary Secretary for Economic Corridor Development
Chelsae Petrovic	Parliamentary Secretary for Health Workforce Engagement
Jason Stephan	Parliamentary Secretary for Constitutional Affairs
Ron Wiebe	Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health (North)
Justin Wright	Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health (South)
Tany Yao	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Northern Development

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

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Kasawski  
Kayande  
Rowswell  
Stephan  
Wiebe  
Wright, J.

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

Chair: Mr. Wiebe  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach  
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Elmeligi  
Hoyle  
Stephan  
van Dijken  
Wright, J.

### **Select Special Citizen Initiative Proposal Review Committee**

Chair: Mr. Lundy  
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Sawhney  
Ellingson  
Nixon  
Pancholi  
Sawyer

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

Chair: Ms Lovely  
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring  
Batten  
Getson  
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Lundy  
Sawyer  
Singh  
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Shepherd  
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### **Special Standing Committee on Members' Services**

Chair: Mr. McIver  
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Metz  
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Sabir  
Singh

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

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Cyr  
Armstrong-Homeniuk  
Bouchard  
Ceci  
Deol  
Dyck  
Hayter  
Lovely  
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Chair: Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk  
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Brar, Gurinder  
Brar, Gurtej  
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### **Standing Committee on Public Accounts**

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Lundy  
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Lovely  
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### **Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship**

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

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 21, 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 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:** First school group. Edmonton-City Centre.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you grade 6 students from Holy Child school with their teacher Eve Molina. I had a chance to meet with them at the School at the Legislature this morning. I invite them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Calgary-Varsity.

**Dr. Metz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you a school group from Maria Montessori Education Centre, which is from kindergarten to grade 9, along with their teachers William Porto and Lucas Willumsen. I ask you to rise and receive the congratulations from the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The Minister of Children and Family Services.

**Mr. Turton:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly some amazing students from my riding out in Stony Plain from SML Christian Academy, including my very good friend Samson Meyer, who attends that school. Please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Wilson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Glenda Calvert and her family along with her colleagues and board of the McDougall House. For 25 years Glenda has helped those overcome the disease of addiction. I ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services.

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the Rimbey Community Home Help Services team. They are here today from Rimbey in Ponoka county, the land of Ralph Klein's Martha and Henry, up here for important meetings. I thank them for all their hard work in our community through you and ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Edmonton-McClung.

**Mr. Dach:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Loranna and Milton Zatorski. Loranna is the VP for the Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock Constituency Association for the Alberta NDP, who I visited on the weekend. It's a pleasure to see them in the gallery. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

**Mr. Williams:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very glad to welcome members of the Alberta New Home Warranty Program, who protect homeowners and strengthen Alberta housing, here in the Legislature today. They're here on important business, meeting in my office and other MLAs, so please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House, Scott Hamilton, Jocelyn Da Silva, Paul Lanni, Anna Bodnar, Scott Fash, and Adil Kodian.

### Statement by the Speaker

#### 110th Anniversary of Women's Suffrage

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Sunday was the 110th anniversary of the Equal Suffrage Statutory Law Amendment Act, which received royal assent on May 19, 1916. That act marked a defining moment in our parliamentary history, extending the right to vote and to hold public office to most Alberta women. While today we... [interjection] Yeah. Sure. Let's celebrate. Yes. Today we mark this important milestone; we also acknowledge that the full promise of democratic equality was realized only gradually, as other groups continued to face barriers well beyond 1916.

The campaign for women's suffrage in Alberta was neither brief nor easy. During the early years of this province participation in public life was denied to women, a reality that now seems incomprehensible yet was once firmly entrenched. Suffragists such as Nellie McClung, Emily Murphy, and Alice Jamieson brought their demands to this very Legislature repeatedly before ultimately achieving success through determination and persistence.

In 1915 suffragists made their case clear. On February 27 Premier Arthur Sifton and his cabinet agreed to meet with a small group of the suffragists that afternoon. Imagine their surprise when they entered the Chamber that day to find the suffragists occupying the members' seats and the galleries. It was an orderly but powerful demonstration, and their actions helped convince the government of the day that equality could no longer be delayed.

This anniversary offers an opportunity both to commemorate the historic progress and to reflect on the responsibility entrusted to this Assembly to safeguard democratic participation and ensure this institution remains worthy of all the people it serves.

### Members' Statements

#### Alberta in Canada

**Member Tejada:** Albertans across the province voiced their opposition to separation loudly and clearly. More than 430,000 Albertans signed the forever Canada petition to say one simple thing. We Choose Canada. That is democracy in action. That is Albertans making their voices heard. That sounds like direct democracy to me.

Canadians are resilient people. We come together around the values we share: fairness, opportunity, respect, and a belief that we are better together than apart. Those values are what make this country great. Standing up for Canada does not mean turning our backs on Alberta. In fact, it means the opposite. We stand up for Alberta's workers, families, and communities. We can ask for

fairness within the federation while still believing in this country. Loving your province and loving your country are not competing ideas.

Canada's diversity has allowed us, generation after generation, to adapt, innovate, and succeed, different perspectives, ethnicities, cultures, religions pulling together as a shared future. Alberta is part of and benefits from this strength. It is simply not Canadian nature to unite around what divides us. We are builders. We look for solutions. Canadians choose co-operation over conflict and hope over fear.

Is our country perfect? Of course not. No one is pretending that it is, but division is not the best we can do. Canada is worth fighting for, worth improving, and worth believing in. I refuse to give up on Canada. I believe in building a strong Alberta, and we do that as Canadians. For anyone who feels the same, join [foralbertaforcanada.ca](http://foralbertaforcanada.ca).

### Canadian Nationalism

**Mrs. Petrovic:** Mr. Speaker, the NDP are counting on Albertans to forget their record, but Albertans have a long memory. For years we have sat in this Chamber and listened to the members opposite, including the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, consistently question the very foundation of our country. They cannot escape their record. Time and time again they have framed Canada as an ongoing colonial project and a broken system built on violence. [interjections]

For many Albertans celebrating Canada Day and our nation's history isn't something to be ashamed of. Albertans remember when the Member for Edmonton-South said that celebrating Canada Day was a complicated choice. Albertans remember when the former NDP candidate for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain proudly tweeted that she felt wrong for celebrating Canada Day.

But cancelling Canada Day is not enough for their extremist supporters. Albertans remember when another candidate in Peace River in 2023 called Canadians supporters of genocide for opposing the removal of statues of our nation's first Prime Minister. Albertans remember when the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford shared anti-Canada imagery in support of tearing down statues across the country. [interjections]

Now, when Albertans of all backgrounds have real grievances with our place in Confederation, our youth have historically low levels of national pride, the NDP want us to forget that they have promoted the extreme left destruction of national pride in our communities because they thought it was politically useful. My advice to the members opposite: put your words into action and stop insulting Albertans and Canadians as you have over the last decade.

Our United Conservative government continues to lead with conviction while ensuring that our historical successes and challenges inform our decision-making. Unlike the opposition, we aren't ashamed of our country's past; we celebrate it.

**The Speaker:** This will be the first time that I remind people not to interrupt members' statements, even members from the same side of the House.

1:40

### Electoral Boundaries

**Member Kayande:** Mr. Speaker, I was born in Fort McMurray. My dad worked at the mine. My mom figured out how to cook Indian food when the grocery was 450 kilometres away. We moved to Edmonton when I was young, and I spent many years here. I've never lived in any other Canadian province except Alberta. This is my home. The promise of Canada is that it doesn't matter where you come from or how you make your living or who you love or what God you pray to; everyone here is equal and everyone belongs.

But now the UCP government is threatening that promise under its scheme to rig the election maps. The majority culture is still a little bit strange to my parents even after all these years, but what they know deep in their bones and in their hearts is that their kids had the same chance to achieve success as any other Canadian kid. I'm afraid that's increasingly less true. The UCP's failure to accept the entire Electoral Boundaries Commission report means that they want to value the votes of some Albertans more than others. There are going to be classes of Canadian citizens who simply matter less electorally because the neighbourhoods they live in might tend to vote differently than the UCP government would like.

What this says to people who live in north Calgary and south Edmonton: your vote matters less. That's why class sizes are out of control, hospitals don't get built, why everything is so expensive all the time. It's because this government plans to strip your vote of its power by blending it with communities 50 kilometres away, with towns far away like Airdrie and Cochrane and Beaumont. Instead of governing for the people, they will change election rules to benefit themselves.

We see naked vote-bank politics like this in the old country all the time. It's so sad that the UCP government is bringing it here to Canada.

**The Speaker:** Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

### Federal Strategy to Protect Nature

**Mr. Cyr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With all this talk of a new Liberal government in Ottawa I'm reminded of the old saying from the Bible: a leopard can't change its spots. Indeed, what we are seeing from Ottawa these days is more of the same ideological nonsense that they're known for. This time it is their insistence on protecting 30 per cent of all land in Canada by 2030. Well, under their arbitrary definition Alberta currently is at roughly 15 per cent of protected land. So where is all this new protected land going to come from? Well, logistically the only place where it can come from is northern Alberta. Make no mistake. This is an attack on northern Albertans, our economy, and our way of life.

We do not need out-of-touch federal bureaucrats from Ottawa to decide what we do with our land. Northern Alberta is a pristine landscape of forests, lakes, and muskeg. All of it is teeming with wildlife and biodiversity. Alberta has found a balance between protecting our environment without strangling our economy. We are not asking for this. In fact, the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas recently announced that if land outside of the provincial and national parks is included, almost 60 per cent of the province is protected in some way. We have our own made-in-Alberta approach, and it works.

So why are the Liberals so determined to push forward with this arbitrary goal? Mr. Speaker, these are the same old eco-radical Liberals who care only about pandering to their base in the downtowns of eastern Canada. They care more about virtue signalling and woke posturing than helping Albertans or the environment. If there is any way for them to assert more control over the provinces, they will always take it regardless of the facts. A leopard can't change its spots. Alberta needs to keep our federal government out of our business.

Thank you.

### Tourism Levy

**Ms Goehring:** The UCP's disastrous budget manages to rack up a \$9.4 billion deficit while leaving everyday Albertans struggling just to stay afloat. Somehow they keep finding new ways to waste

money while doing absolutely nothing to make life better or more affordable for working people. Just one example is the tourism levy, which the government hiked by more than 50 per cent in Budget 2026. Instead of reinvesting that money into the tourist sector to help grow our economy, welcome visitors to our beautiful province, or make it easier for Albertans to explore their own backyard, that revenue is going into the UCP budget black hole. This means that families who might have been saving all winter to spend this summer in Jasper, Banff, or Waterton Lakes will need to pay more or cancel their travel plans. It means that budget-conscious travellers from other provinces or countries might delay that trip to Alberta until flights, hotels, and rental cars don't cost an arm and a leg.

To make things even worse, this UCP government is intent on making Albertans pay an extra 13 cents per litre while gas prices surge. They could do everyone a favour and give people a break at the pumps. Gas has been as high as a buck seventy-five in Edmonton, all because of the Premier's friend Donald Trump, but she continues to plug her ears while Alberta's New Democrats tell her to remove the gas tax today.

Under this UCP government even a weekend road trip is an out-of-reach luxury for some. From a pricier car insurance, a higher gas tax than Ottawa's, and now added fees on hotels or cabin rentals, it's clear that the UCP will make you pay more.

**The Speaker:** Edmonton-McClung.

### Highway 3 Twinning

**Mr. Dach:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On March 27 a newly formed Highway 3 Resident and Landowner Coalition submitted a petition signed by 104 southern Albertan farmers, ranchers, and rural residents calling on the province to ensure that interim highway 3 twinning decisions align with established rural arterial divided, or RAD, design standards. The petition asked for practical measures, including preserving functional farmland and residential access where safety allows, incorporating agricultural median crossings where required, and considering alternative engineered solutions.

Coalition members support twinning highway 3. Their concern is not the project itself, but how the UCP government is going about it. The current proposed upgrade to freeway standards eliminates direct access from farm gate to highway. On top of this, many farmers and ranchers will be required to build a road across their own land, without compensation, to access the nearest range road, and irrigation farmers and cattle ranchers point out that carving an access road across their pastures and irrigated plots will destroy their existing operations.

These requests echo long-standing recommendations by the Alberta Chambers of Commerce to twin highway 3 as a highway rather than a freeway in order to maintain access flexibility, control costs, and support regional economic activity. End quote. The coalition is asking the government to incorporate their needs into design decisions.

However, rural Alberta's voice continues to be ignored by this government. The UCP MLA for Cypress-Medicine Hat abruptly cancelled a scheduled meeting with resident landowners once the coalition was formed. Albertans long for reconciliation and respect from their provincial government; what they get from the UCP for speaking out is retribution.

Alberta farmers are trying to get their products from their farms to our tables. When they tell us how to help them, we should listen. Alberta New Democrats hear the advice of agricultural producers loud and clear. We're ready to govern with our eyes wide open and

our ears to the ground to help you feed the world. You can bet your boots on it.

### Tabling Returns and Reports

**The Speaker:** Are there tablings? Edmonton-McClung.

**Mr. Dach:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite five copies of an article produced by CBC entitled Alberta Premier [in my view, unconvincingly] Denies Claims of UCP Interference on Electoral Boundaries.

**The Speaker:** Calgary-Currie.

**Member Eremenko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Per my question today, I'm tabling a letter concerning multiple undisclosed conflicts of interest from leadership at the Centre of Recovery Excellence.

**The Speaker:** Are there more tablings? The hon. Minister of Justice.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the five requisite copies of a letter from Inclusion Alberta expressing support for Bill 18, which, if passed, will stop MAID for those with mental illness as a sole underlying cause.

### Tablings to the Clerk

**The Clerk:** I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Minister LaGrange, Minister of Primary and Preventative Health Services, pursuant to the Health Quality Council of Alberta Act Health Quality Alberta 2024-25 Annual Report.

1:50

### Oral Question Period

**The Speaker:** We'll start with a very brief reminder that the English language has something north of 100,000 words in it. We should try to use the ones that are not included in the green books that have the words that we don't say in here. Let's find other ones. The first person with that opportunity is the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**Mr. Nenshi:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I will try.

### Electoral Boundaries

**Mr. Nenshi:** Even members of the independent boundaries commission think something strange happened here. Former commission member and former mayor of Sylvan Lake Susan Samson said in the press, quote, she believes something or someone pressured the UCP members of the commission to come up with a minority report. We know who that something or someone was. It was the UCP government and, more specifically, the Premier's office. Was the Premier aware of this level of political interference, or did she not know about it?

**The Speaker:** The Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There were two members appointed by the NDP. There were two members appointed by the UCP. They had different ideas about how to solve the problem of maintaining rural representation. There are some members who thought that they could eliminate two seats. There are other members who thought that they could do hybrids. The judge: he came up with an elegant solution so that you didn't have to sacrifice

two additional seats. He suggested that we move to 91 seats. That is the motion that is going to be debated in this Legislature.

**Mr. Nenshi:** Of course, that wasn't the question at all. The question was about interference in the process, and it should trouble every single Albertan that the Premier is waffling on this question.

Let's go back to Susan Samson. She tells a story of how the UCP commissioners completely did a one-eighty. They completely flipped, changed their minds long after the public hearings were done, and came up with these maps. Within two or three weeks, she says, they can produce an entire set of maps for the entire province. You tell me where that came from. Premier, where did it come from?

**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, the members opposite should take our AI academy because then they'd learn how to use the marvels of modern technology as well so that they can develop their own maps. There is no complexity in using technology to develop maps. The issue at play here is that two rural seats were eliminated as a result of a restriction of 89 seats, which this Legislature agreed to. The judge said that the way that he could solve the impasse on the committee was to go up to 91 seats. That's what's being debated.

**Mr. Nenshi:** I think the Premier just admitted that staff in her office used AI to try and gerrymander the maps. Here's the thing. The Premier's staff was sharing these maps. They used them to sell memberships. The UCP riding associations used the exact same maps. The minister of transportation waved these maps around. It's clear that these things were created with government-document identifiers on them by government resources to influence the supposedly independent commission. There are only two options here: either the Premier knew or she was kept in the dark. Which is it?

**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, I let the independent commission do its work. I let them go across the province, and they did. They got a number of submissions by a number of people, and there was a difference of opinion by the committee members. The way the judge proposed solving that disagreement was to go up to 91 seats. That is, again, what's going to be debated in a fulsome way in this Legislature, and I'll look forward to that debate as well.

**The Speaker:** Now we're at the second set of questions, which still belongs to the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**Mr. Nenshi:** To be clear, there was one majority report and one recommendation. The judge wrote that he was getting so much political pressure from the UCP that rather than passing the unconstitutional minority report, they should try and do something different. This was not a Hail Mary or a try to bring things together. It was a result of political pressure.

Meanwhile Elections Alberta tells us that they need 12 to 18 months to institute new maps. The government's timeline will not allow the new maps to come into place. Is the government's plan to run the next election on the old maps that already discount Calgary and Edmonton?

**Ms Smith:** If I may correct the record, Mr. Speaker, the judge said nothing of the kind. The judge indicated that there was a difference of opinion among the members of the committee, and the way to resolve that impasse was to potentially go to 91 seats. He also gave some indication on how to do that. That is going to be determined by this Legislature. These are the decisions that have to be debated here. I'm looking forward to the debate, and we'll see how members

end up voting on that, but this is a decision of Members of the Legislative Assembly.

**Mr. Nenshi:** To quote the judge directly, Mr. Speaker, "I find it necessary to make one further recommendation that my fellow Commissioners cannot consent to," and that was after the fact, after he saw the UCP-authored minority report. The Premier still hasn't answered the question. If Elections Alberta says that it is physically impossible for them to be able to abide by these timelines and have a new map in place by our fixed election date next October, how is she planning on proceeding? Will we run the election on the old map?

**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that Elections Alberta has said that they would not be able to do it without sufficient resources. They have gone before the independent legislative committee from time to time to ask for sufficient resources, whether it was a number of recall petitions or a number of citizen-initiated petitions. I am very confident that the independent members of that committee will ensure Elections Alberta has all the resources that they need to be prepared in time for the election slated for October of 2027.

**Mr. Nenshi:** Of course, Mr. Speaker, every time Elections Alberta has asked for more money, this government has denied them. In this case Elections Alberta is not asking for more money; they're asking for more time. They need time to update their systems. They need time to hire returning officers. They need time to tell Albertans when and how to vote. How will the government find them this time, not money, or does the government understand that their process means the election goes to the old maps?

**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, we have had 800,000 people come to this province in the last 10 years. This is the reason why we need to have new maps. It has been litigated in other jurisdictions like Quebec attempting to run on the old boundaries, and that is still active litigation. That is not our intention. Our intention is to listen to the direction of the judge and increase the number of seats to 91, which will be debated by this Legislature before the end of the week. If Elections Alberta needs additional resources – they had an increase of 25 per cent – I'm confident the committee will give them an increase.

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

**Mr. Nenshi:** But, of course, all that growth happened before this government chose to have only 89 seats to try and deny Calgary and Edmonton more seats.

The good news is that the Premier clarified on her radio show this weekend. She said: keep the majority the most of the majority report. I don't know what that means, but she thinks that Elections Alberta could start working on the majority report now. Does she understand that this isn't just about bringing back Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre and Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland? Adding two seats means redrawing the entire map from top to bottom, including Calgary and Edmonton. Does she . . .

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

**Ms Smith:** Well, I think the addendum is very clear, Mr. Speaker, about the things that the judge has recommended for how to move to 91 seats from 89, and that is the motion that will be debated in the Legislature. That would be the direction that would be given to the independent committee that's looking at it as well as the new

commission that's established. Moving up to 91 seats allows us to ensure that Calgary and Edmonton get the extra representation they need without sacrificing two seats in rural Alberta. I think it's an elegant solution.

**Mr. Nenshi:** I'm not sure the Premier does understand the math problem she has created, but I will point out that the chair actually said, "This Addendum in no way detracts from the majority report representing the views of a majority of the Commission." It wasn't meant to overcharge the majority. The point is that the government made this bed. They explicitly changed the rules to deny Calgary and Edmonton more seats. So based on what the Premier just said, will she commit today to leaving Calgary, Edmonton, Red Deer, and Lethbridge the same as the majority report?

**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, the independent committee is going to then hire on a new commission, and it will be the new commission that will take the direction from this Legislature, which includes looking at the majority report as the base, with the modifications proposed by the judge in his addendum, and they will come up with a conclusion about what that should look like by the fall, and then we will have an opportunity to debate it here. I'm not involved in the process. The government is not involved in the process. This is a decision of Members of the Legislative Assembly and the independent commission.

2:00

**Mr. Nenshi:** That was a little bit perplexing. What we know is that, first of all, there is no new commission despite the Premier using that language. It's an advisory committee that reports to a UCP-dominated committee that never comes back to the Legislature.

The Premier this weekend also said that she's no longer in favour of the hybrid ridings that her own Justice minister enabled through his legislation just a year ago. So enabling hybrid ridings didn't work. Attempting to stack the commission didn't work. The UCP is not getting the answers they're looking for. What assurances will the Premier give Albertans that this time it'll be fair?

**The Speaker:** The Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks for the correction that it will go to an independent advisory committee from an independent member. It was comprised of members of this Assembly.

I do support hybrid ridings, evidently, because I represent one. It is Medicine Hat, Brooks, multiple small municipalities, various hamlets, as well as the county of Newell. It works. The commission decided that it worked. They didn't make many changes to our area. There are a number of places where this kind of hybrid approach makes sense. The judge had a difference of opinion about where those should be, and he offered his guidance on that, and that's what the independent committee will look at.

**Ms Gray:** Mr. Speaker, the reviews are in, and nobody wants the government to gerrymander Alberta's election maps. Let's start with the Premier's former bestie and political organizer David Parker, who wrote, "The map being proposed by [the Premier] and the UCP is an absolute joke. Red Deer should have its own ridings, not be ripped apart into a pie shaped monstrosity." Why is the UCP redrawing the map so blatantly that even UCP fan David Parker opposes this?

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

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member opposite for the question. The Premier has been very clear, as have others who have discussed this, that it's important to make sure that

Albertans across the province have effective representation, which is done with the proper number of seats. That is why the commission and the judge of the commission recommended going to 91, which was in the addendum. We're following those recommendations. That's why we have a motion on the floor today that will be debated, and I look forward to that robust debate.

**Ms Gray:** The judge recommended the adoption of the majority report clearly and with no additional periods, exclamation marks, gerrymandering, any of the above, Mr. Speaker. The Canadian Civil Liberties Association says that

the Alberta government's unusual involvement with the electoral map revision process erodes public confidence in the electoral system . . . The process should include public consultations, [should] be transparent from beginning to end, and elected officials should respect its outcome.

Why won't this government let the Assembly vote on the commission's recommended maps, the majority maps they've repeatedly promised would happen?

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

**Mr. Schow:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not just members of the government and members of the caucus who are looking for the government to move to 91 seats. One of the NDP's appointees from the committee, Greg Clark, asked during one of the commissions: why go to 89 constituencies instead of 91? This is a question that has been asked a number of times. We are responding to the report. Clearly, the commission had issues with 89 seats based on what they heard from the constituents around Alberta. We're taking their recommendations.

**Ms Gray:** The government picked 89.

Now, poli-sci professor Duane Bratt writes that the government's new plan "is not an arm's-length process whose purpose is to find the best, balanced, and fair boundaries, but likely a deliberate attempt to manipulate ridings to benefit the UCP." Columnist Rob Breakenridge says, "We've needlessly complicated and politicized what has been – and what should be – a straightforward process." There's a simple solution. The UCP can tear up their motion and vote to accept the fair and balanced boundaries of the majority report. Will the government abandon this motion and vote for the majority?

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

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I often find it interesting that the NDP continually relies upon Duane Bratt, the armchair quarterback, for advice. What I can say is that if Mr. Bratt wants to have a stronger voice, maybe he should put his name on the ballot.

What I would say is that it was also mentioned in a comment from Greg Clark on the commission on January 2. He said: if we had another two or four seats, these discussions would be a lot easier. Mr. Speaker, the commission heard from submissions across Alberta and, as a result, made a determination that it'd be best if we had more seats to facilitate effective representation.

**The Speaker:** Okay. We're now past question 4, which means no preambles on the supplementaries.

This next question belongs to Edmonton-North West.

### Provincial Fuel Tax

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Gas prices are too darn high in Alberta, and this UCP government seems perfectly happy to stand by and let Albertans take the hit to their wallets. Cutting the

gas tax right now right here is one of the fastest ways Alberta could ease the pressure on families, workers, and businesses trying to stay afloat as the cost of living skyrockets. It seems the Premier is bitter that the Prime Minister beat her to the punch and reduced federal gas taxes first. Why won't the Premier stop wasting time and cut the gas tax here in Alberta?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I've explained in this House many times that I'm very proud of the fact that Alberta is the only province that has a legislative proactive plan to provide fuel tax relief. We're the only jurisdiction that has this very sensitive linkage to oil that's this impactful, so when the province is in a position where it takes in greater royalties for a sustained period, we automatically provide that relief. I think that everybody should appreciate that. We did run a substantial deficit this year. We're trying to do this in a way that makes sense for people's books and the government's books. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. I hear quite a bit from people that haven't been recognized.

Right now we just want to hear from the Member for Edmonton-North West.

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that even the Premier's pal Poilievre is pushing for a break on gas taxes, given that the Premier's own federal MP said, "In the middle of an affordability crisis, half solutions aren't enough. Canadians don't need a government that trims good ideas, they need one that follows through and delivers real savings," will the Premier listen to Albertans from across the political spectrum that are calling for relief at the pumps right now?

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, we talk a lot about the Alberta advantage in this House, and yelling something to the contrary won't change the fact that it's alive and well here in Alberta. If I look at the average fuel price for April ending April 15: 30 cents higher in B.C., 6 cents higher in Saskatchewan, 7 cents a litre higher in Manitoba, 15 cents a litre higher in Ontario, 27 cents a litre higher in Quebec. That's right now. Manitoba already has their fuel tax off. I'm glad that the feds did what they could. They could still take GST off. We're going to manage the government's, province's finances the best we can.

**Mr. Eggen:** Well, given that, unlike the Premier, most Albertans don't have a friend in Saudi royalty that can offer them a flight of fancy to their destination of choice and given that the Alberta New Democrats have been calling for relief at the pumps for months, why won't this government work with us today to provide immediate gas tax relief instead of making Albertans eat the high gas prices until their so-called formula catches up with reality? [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

Only the Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, it's wild, the gall of the members opposite, that they take this line of questioning after in this House legitimizing a carbon tax that in its last iteration added 17 cents a litre to the fuel purchases of all Canadians. Their rationale for it was: "We want to incentivize behavioural change. You can walk. You can take the bus." That was the policy goal that they had. Look at what we're saying: manage the province's finances; provide relief when we can best afford it. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order.

The next question belongs to the Member for Grande Prairie.

## Energy Development Policies

**Mr. Dyck:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Northern Alberta is the economic driver of Alberta, but we are constantly berated by radical left-leaning, left-wing ideologues who fly around in jets across the world to bash our energy sector. The NDP hasn't changed. Ten years ago Notley appointed anti Alberta oil and gas activist Tzaporah Berman to a government advisory panel, and today the NDP continues to push anti Alberta energy through their new boss, Avi Lewis. Can the Minister of Energy and Minerals explain why we should be producing more oil and gas and not turning off the taps?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Energy and Minerals. [interjections] Order. Order. This isn't hard.

2:10

**Mr. Jean:** Well, that's true, Mr. Speaker. The world wants more Alberta oil and gas. Conflicts in Iran, conflicts in Ukraine: it underscores the need for more Alberta oil and gas right now. We just signed an agreement with South Korea to remove tariffs on Alberta crude, a big step forward by this Premier, taking real steps and real action. Demand will be met by someone around the world. It should be met by Alberta and Alberta workers making Alberta products to distribute to the world. We have the largest democratic reserves of oil and gas in the world, and more of our gas means a better world.

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

**Mr. Dyck:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that every dollar difference in the price of oil translates to \$680 million for government coffers and given that we are a landlocked province reliant on co-operation from other provinces and the federal government and further given that services don't pay for themselves and we can't simply pull money from the New Democratic money tree, can the Minister of Energy and Minerals give a better understanding of how the MOU signed with the feds will hopefully lead to expansion and drive our economy forward for generations to come?

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

**Mr. Jean:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's true. This MOU gets rid of most of the bad laws from the previous governments, which, by the way, the NDP supported. We're working to get a 1 million barrel per day pipeline on the projects of national interest list, so important to this country. We're working with Indigenous groups and private industry to ensure it's done properly from the very beginning. This pipeline is truly an economic game changer, and the MOU – thankfully, this Premier took the initiative to do it – will also pave the way for major projects like data centres and transmission projects. Our government is focused on building a better, stronger Alberta.

**The Speaker:** Grande Prairie.

**Mr. Dyck:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there continues to be demand for Alberta energy products no matter what lefty activists say and given that Alberta has the oil and gas reserves to provide security for countries around the world and further given that on this side of the Chamber we are proud to stand up for Alberta's oil and gas sector, to the Minister of Energy and Minerals: since United Conservatives came into government in 2019, can you remind all members of this Assembly of the wins Alberta has

already secured and how we continue to advocate for growth for the future?

**Mr. Jean:** I'd like to thank the hard-working Member for Grande Prairie for his advocacy for our resource sector, Mr. Speaker. We have truly broken down barriers, negotiated the MOU with Ottawa. We have gotten rid of some bad laws, and more to come. We're growing global markets. We just signed an agreement with South Korea to end tariffs on our crude. We have record oil production. We have delivered multibillion-dollar investments from Dow, Linde, and Air Products. More to come. We've introduced Bill 30, Expedited 120-Day Approvals Act. We wake up every morning with one thing in mind on this side of the House: how to make Alberta the best place to live, work, and play.

### Surgical Wait Times

**Member Irwin:** Maria is an Alberta woman who is on a two-year wait-list to receive knee replacement surgery. She's been told she can pay more than \$20,000 privately for surgery immediately by the same doctors who are serving the public health care system. Maria doesn't have that kind of money, and like so many Albertans, she does not endorse two-tier health care and continued privatization. Maria asks the Premier to think about what it's like to walk around for two years on a knee that feels like it's disintegrating. To the Premier: what do you have to say to Maria?

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

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Those waits are unacceptable, which is why we're putting record funding into our surgical program. Last year we completed around 318,000 surgeries. This year – I just got a recent update – we're on track for over 332,000, and that's before the additional half a billion dollars through the acute-care action plan increases those numbers even further. The wait times are not acceptable. They will come down as we do more procedures, getting patients the care they need when and where they need it.

**Member Irwin:** Given that after I shared Maria's story on social media, I was inundated by other heartbreaking stories from folks all over Alberta, let's take the example of a mom who shared that her daughter waited two years to have a bilateral joint replacement in her jaw. All they could do is wait and hope that the degeneration wouldn't spread too far and require even more invasive surgery. What does the health minister say to this family that went through hell waiting for surgery? How will he make sure that no other family has to experience this?

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

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of ways that we're working to increase our ability to do even more surgeries. For example, we're looking at piloting using underutilized ORs in the evenings and weekends to do more surgeries. We're looking at developing a voucher program where patients who have waited longer than clinically recommended can go to any approved or accredited provider in Alberta and get that surgery. You don't have to wait for one particular surgeon at one particular location. There are options, and we're going to connect patients through public funds to surgeons who can do it faster.

**Member Irwin:** Given that vouchers are certainly not the answer and given that there are not enough hours in question period for me to share even a fraction of the health care stories that I've been

hearing, from waiting for surgeries for gallbladders, feet, knees, hips, and more to waiting for MRIs, the stories are just so heavy, and it doesn't need to be this way. As Friends of Medicare points out, every time the UCP announces more privatization, more vouchers, the data is clear. It reduces public capacity, it worsens wait times for patients, and it ultimately costs us so much more. When will the UCP realize this? Hopefully, before it's too late because lives are at stake.

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the ways that we're also looking to increase surgical volumes is by attracting record numbers of health care professionals to our province. Over the last five years we have successfully added over 2,000 doctors. We've added over 12,000 registered nurses. We've added over 500 nurse practitioners, over 10,000 health care aides, and they continue to come to Alberta because we're making the changes necessary not just to improve patient outcomes but to improve health care workers' experience and the system performance in general. We're not going to stop here.

**The Speaker:** The next question belongs to the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

### Alberta Separatism

**Mr. Gurtej Brar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents are proud Albertans and proud Canadians. They value their freedom, their public health care, quality education, and strong pensions. They do not want to separate our province from our country. In my view and in my constituents' view, you cannot tear our identity apart. Why would the UCP not stand for Alberta for Canada? Why does this government refuse to denounce separatism?

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

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our Premier stands for Alberta every single day, and we believe in a strong, sovereign Alberta within a united Canada. That's why we signed the memorandum of understanding with the government of Canada to get our world-class products to market, and that's why just hours ago we also signed a memorandum of understanding with Hanwha Group to continue to further our relationship and diversify our trade relationships with Korea, because a strong Canada needs a strong Alberta, and that strong Alberta is led by our Premier.

**Mr. Gurtej Brar:** Given that one of the most important parts of Canada that makes Albertans proud is the CPP and given that pulling Alberta out of Canada means my constituents would lose their CPP and given they have worked hard all their lives to earn these pensions and given this hard work could be gambled away if we lose the CPP, why won't the government denounce separatism as a threat to the retirement security and pensions of Albertans?

**Mr. Schow:** Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House what we reject are the misplaced ideas of the NDP, which would continue to drive our province into oblivion. When they were in government, they told Albertans to leave the province, and they saw net outflow of people out of this province because they didn't see this as a prosperous place to live and to work. On this side of the House we continue to attract investment. We continue to help the private sector create jobs; in fact, over 100,000 jobs created year over year. Alberta is leading the charge, a strong part of Canada.

**Mr. Gurtej Brar:** Given my constituents are proud Canadians and given that standing for Alberta and for Canada means rejecting our province becoming the 51st state and given the separatists want us to become a state of the U.S. and given we would lose access to jobs and trade opportunities if we become the 51st state, when will this government stand up for our rights as Canadians and stand up for Alberta and for Canada?

2:20

**Mr. Schow:** Mr. Speaker, the only way that Alberta will ever see us losing jobs is if we elect the NDP again to be government. I can tell you that we will take no lessons from them on things like diplomacy. As you just heard in the question from the member opposite, rather than talk about our largest trading partner and finding ways to make inroads and support a tariff-free relationship, they would rather insult our friends to the south. It's that kind of relationship, that kind of diplomacy that could have never got the MOU signed today with Hanwah Group. The members opposite continue to show us why they are in opposition and they'll stay there.

### Wildfire Prevention and Control

**Mr. Sinclair:** Mr. Speaker, Albertans know the dangers of wildfires and the lasting impact they have on our province. It is vital that Alberta is prepared to respond effectively to protect our communities. These risks are felt across the province, including the people of Lesser Slave Lake that I proudly represent. We will never forget the fire in 2011 in Slave Lake. My house never burned, but many of my friends and families lost theirs. Fire season is now an annual reminder of how quickly our collective anxieties can become real danger. To the Minister of Forestry and Parks: how is our government currently working to mitigate and respond to wildfire risks across our province?

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

**Mr. Loewen:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Albertans expect their government to be ready when wildfires threaten lives, communities, and the land, and keeping people safe is our top priority. Right now our focus is on prevention, mitigation, and response. We are investing in mitigation across Alberta through FireSmart programs, community fireguards, vegetation management, and prescribed burns to reduce risk before fires start. At the same time Alberta Wildfire crews are trained, staffed, and positioned across the province to respond quickly, whether through rapid initial attack or longer term firefighting operations. Together these actions ensure Alberta is better prepared to reduce wildfire risk.

**The Speaker:** Lesser Slave Lake.

**Mr. Sinclair:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that response. Given that growing frequency and intensity of wildfires across Alberta continues to threaten communities, infrastructure, and livelihoods, underscoring the urgent need for a stronger and more co-ordinated provincial response, further given that investing in early detection, firefighting resources, and community preparedness is critical to minimizing the devastating impact of wildfires, to the same minister: what specific steps is our government taking to bolster Alberta Wildfire response capacity and ensure that communities are better protected when fires break out?

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

**Mr. Loewen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's response is guided by our wildfire mitigation strategy, which takes a whole-of-society approach to reducing risk and improving preparedness. This means working closely with municipal fire departments, Indigenous communities, industry, and other partners to ensure a co-ordinated and effective response when fires break out. A key focus of the strategy is preparedness and rapid response. We are meeting this by strengthening response capacity through innovation and new tools, including enhanced aviation resources and hoist-equipped helicopters, which help deploy firefighters safely into remote or challenging terrain and improve firefighter safety.

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

**Mr. Sinclair:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his response. Given that the town of Slave Lake and the East Prairie Métis settlement have both experienced the devastating consequences of wildfires first-hand and remain vulnerable to the ongoing and growing threat of future fire events and further given that proactive risk mitigation, community preparedness, and investment in local firefighting capacity are essential to protecting the lives and homes of residents, to the same minister: what is our government doing to mitigate wildfire risks in and around the Lesser Slave Lake constituency and ensure that we're better prepared and protected against future fires?

**Mr. Loewen:** The town of Slave Lake and surrounding region know first-hand how devastating wildfires can be, and that experience continues to guide our government's actions to reduce risk and strengthen preparedness in the Lesser Slave Lake constituency. In 2025 Slave Lake was selected as one of the first of 32 priority communities under Alberta's community hazardous fuel reduction program, recognizing the high risk in and around the community. Hazardous fuel reduction work has already begun and completed across 340 hectares, including work near Fawcett Lake, Mitsue Lake, and Trout Lake. Last year the town of Slave Lake was chosen as one of our just four communities in Alberta to host new wildland-urban interface teams.

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

### CORE Study on Supervised Drug Consumption Sites

**Member Eremenko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today I tabled a letter addressed to all MLAs raising significant concerns about CORE, the Centre of Recovery Excellence. This \$8-million-a-year arm of the Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction didn't just pull the wool over the eyes of the publishers at *Addiction*, a reputable medical journal; they've convinced most Albertans that no harm would come as a result of the closure of supervised consumption services. Well, an application for a court injunction would argue otherwise. Is the minister aware of the critique and the lack of transparency in this, CORE's first published report?

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

**Mr. Wilson:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is focused on the Alberta recovery model to help individuals facing substance use disorder and addiction to get the targeted health services they need. It's such an important thing. We're out there, we're saving lives, and CORE is a good part of it. That group: these are researchers, these are scientists, and we welcome the study that they conducted from the Canadian centre of recovery. This was a peer-reviewed and published report that was published in a very prestigious

journal, in the *Addiction* journal. This report shows us that these sites are not helping people. In fact, they're . . .

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

**Member Eremenko:** Given that CORE is a Crown corporation and is in no way objective or independent or at arm's length from the UCP minister, who controls its budget, research strategy, and leadership selection, and given that CORE's so-called research is the latest in a slew of torqued reports the UCP has trotted out to justify bad policy and given CORE is about as objective as Kenney's energy war room, can the minister admit that of course CORE's finding agrees with the UCP's decision to close supervised consumption services? They don't get paid . . .

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Yeah. You only get 35 seconds.

And just, I hope, a gentle caution that we should be a little bit cautious when we're talking about things that are before the courts so that we don't prejudice the legal proceedings.

**Mr. Wilson:** Mr. Speaker, I would welcome anybody to come with me to a supervised drug consumption site. I was just there the beginning of the week. I'm still having nightmares about this. We're not helping people there. We are not helping people. These things were put there. They were for a very specific purpose. This is when AIDS first came, we had a crisis, and we were trying to help people. They've evolved into something that is not helping people anymore. These people that are in there: I've actually seen them collapse and die right in front of me. These places are not helping people. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Make me raise my voice.

The Member for Calgary-Currie is the one we should hear from.

**Member Eremenko:** Given that nobody has ever died in an Alberta supervised consumption service, given that this government has cut harm reduction services, given that this government no longer provides drug testing strips or supplies to stop the sexually transmitted and blood-borne illnesses that are in fact creating and inform the public health crisis that we had upon us that the minister so kindly references and reminds us of, given that several of the coauthors fail to disclose deep and numerous conflicts of interest to the academic journal, including being hand-picked by the minister and providing expert testimony in defence of the UCP . . .

**The Speaker:** Your 35 seconds are up. That's why I stood up.

**Mr. Wilson:** Well, Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we're hope dealers. The other side: I'm not sure what they do over there. I've seen the results of what we're doing out there, 39 per cent down in opioid deaths in Alberta. I was just in Lethbridge. We actually just opened a recovery community down in Lethbridge at the Kainai community, and afterwards I stopped up at Lethbridge to see what's going on. The opioid deaths have dropped to just about zero there. That's what happens when we work together with municipalities. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

The next question belongs to the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

#### Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement

**Mr. Wright:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's exporters depend on predictability, open access to trade with the United States and Mexico. Currently our export goods have avoided the harshest of

tariffs thanks to the framework under the Canada-U.S.-Mexico agreement. With Alberta's strong position in agriculture, manufacture, and energy related products, can the Minister of Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration please explain how this government is working to ensure that CUSMA tariff rulings remain tariff free on all Alberta-produced products?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Jobs, Economy, Trade and, my goodness gracious, Immigration.

**Mr. Schow:** Bingo, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, and thank you to that member for the incredible question. He's right. We do prefer a tariff-free relationship with the United States. The Canada-U.S.-Mexico agreement has proven to be important because over the last year it has protected the vast majority of our exports from facing tariffs. Now, this translates to less impact on jobs and paycheques for Albertans and comes as a direct result of the work that our Premier and our government have done to continue to foster relationships with our largest trading partner to the south. Looking ahead, Mr. Speaker, you can count on the members of this government to continue to work with our neighbours to the south.

2:30

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

**Mr. Wright:** Thank you again, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that Alberta is positioning itself as a leading destination for trade and investment and given that CUSMA serves as a key foundation for our economic relationships with our biggest trade partners and further given that the federal government's choice to prioritize communist China versus North American trade partners, putting CUSMA at risk, can the same minister please explain what this government is doing to ensure Alberta benefits from the agreement's potential for growth and mitigating of risk for trade breakdowns should Ottawa and Washington not come to an agreement?

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

**Mr. Schow:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the member for the question. Through you to him: I appreciate his passion for free trade among our partners. The fact is that the U.S. is and will continue to be our largest trading partner. In 2024 Alberta exported \$160 billion worth of goods to the U.S., which accounts for about 89 per cent of our total exports. This is not a trade relationship that we want to replace, and that is why we fully support the renewal of the Canada-U.S.-Mexico trade agreement. That is why we will continue to give input to the federal government as they go into those negotiations.

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

**Mr. Wright:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that CUSMA is quickly approaching the end of its mandatory review period and given that Alberta relies heavily on exports to the United States and Mexico and further given that renewing this agreement is essential for continued growth in Alberta's most important industries, can the same minister please explain what this government is doing to ensure that the federal Liberals in Ottawa prioritize Alberta's economic interest in the CUSMA review?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again through you to the member for the question. The fact is that Alberta has shown massive resilience as a major province with the lowest impact from tariffs.

Now, this is in part thanks to the U.S.-Canada-Mexico agreement, which is why we're asking the federal government to support its renewal. Unfortunately, if we were to take the approach of the members opposite, which is just to insult our neighbours to the south and insult the President of the United States, we would have no footing in these negotiations. But what I can say is that because of the tireless work of our Premier, we are in the good position we're in today to remain in a strong, low-tariff . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

### Hospital Workplace Safety

**Ms Wright:** Mr. Speaker, in 2023 United Nurses of Alberta responded to a lockdown that was the result of a threat of gun violence. For years they've been calling out a lack of workplace safety, but now, three years later, a patient was stabbed in the Royal Alex ER. UNA has said that inaction by this government is a critical failure at keeping patients and staff safe. On Saturday the Premier talked about a pilot project rollout. Will the minister explain to health care workers how long they must wait to see actual violence prevention in our province's emergency rooms?

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

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is no place for violence or harassment in our hospital settings. The weapons screening project that the member opposite was referring to was actually approved last year, and then it was going through the planning and procurement stages. I'm pleased to share that it will be implemented next month, in May. In addition, we have nearly doubled the security presence at the Royal Alex, and we are taking steps to redefine and strongly enforce a zero-tolerance policy going forward. Again, violence and harassment have no place in our hospital settings. Patients and staff will be safe.

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

**Ms Wright:** Given that nurses and all health care workers are entitled to safe workplaces but when they are overworked and patients wait too long, risks increase, given that nearly all experience violence but less than half report and one-third fear retaliation, given that a lack of dedicated whistle-blower protection for health care workers and an absence of employer response makes nurses feel betrayed and undervalued, when can they expect the UCP government to strongly enforce the Criminal Code and OHS legislation and actually address violence in their workplaces?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we do enforce the Criminal Code and OHS in our facilities, and I would encourage any health care worker to report anything that they see that does not comply with the Criminal Code or our occupational health and safety standards. We already have 1,000 personnel – 1,000 – across our hospital system, over 500 peace officers, and over 500 security guards. We're adding another 100 to respond to the escalation of incidents, particularly in our downtown Edmonton area, and we'll do whatever it takes to keep patients and staff safe.

**Ms Wright:** Given that this crisis isn't just about a lack of security or accountability in our hospitals but a lack of staff capacity, given that ER wait times and too few beds are a problem, given that understaffing and excessive workloads add to the risk, given that nurses provided solutions to government months ago, when will nurses be heard, included in the conversation, and get answers to

their justified needs for national standards, violence prevention infrastructure, safe nurse-to-patient ratios, proper hours of care, comprehensive training, and better support for affected workers?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're investing \$91 million over three years in the AHS priorities task force. What this is going to do is expand our emergency rooms, add operating room capacity and surgical teams, reduce ALC volumes, and expand virtual care. We're also investing \$61 million specifically at the Royal Alex hospital to enhance their triage and patient flow, help patients move more seamlessly through the system. We're also working to immediately divert people experiencing homelessness or who need support through shelters or social supports so that we can ensure that our hospitals remain for hospital care. Again, zero tolerance for violence, harassment, or intimidation.

### Provincial Fuel Tax

*(continued)*

**Member Miyashiro:** Mr. Speaker, since the onset of the latest Gulf war higher oil prices mean Alberta will experience significant increases in oil royalties through no work of this provincial government. At the same time we hear on the doors that Albertans are struggling with affordability, especially as inflation is driven higher by high gas prices. So I ask: why is this government not pausing the provincial gas tax to give Albertans some relief at the pumps?

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, I've told this House many times that you can't count your chickens before they're hatched. That's why we have a program in place that monitors the price of oil for three months, and then it adjusts the tax rate for the following three months. If oil is over \$90 during the monitoring period, the tax will come off entirely even if oil plummets, like it did on Friday, by over \$10. We're seeing unbelievable volatility right now. That's why it's important to use the entire monitoring period, because you will see the relief over a full quarter.

**Member Miyashiro:** Given that the federal government is pausing the fuel excise until September 7, which will save Canadians around 10 cents a litre on regular gas and 4 cents a litre on diesel, and given that Manitoba is considering a reduction or elimination of its 12 and a half cents per litre tax and given that Ontario and Newfoundland and Labrador had previously implemented a permanent reduction in fuel taxes, why is this government sticking to their rigid formula that does nothing for Albertans who need gas tax relief now?

**Mr. Horner:** I've already described the program many times. I would remind everyone that we're in a deficit position. If you look at Budget '26, it would show that fuel tax is predicted to bring in roughly \$1.5 billion, so we're talking about \$400 million, potentially a quarter. You're basically asking, if we do this preemptively without ensuring that we get the elevated royalties first, to take on that debt on behalf of Albertans, Mr. Speaker. You should make it clear what you're asking for. I think this is responsible.

**Member Miyashiro:** Given that global economic disruption can be created by conflict in a relatively small but strategic region and given that negative impacts on affordability for Albertans increase during those disruptions and given that the Premier says that saving a few bucks at the pumps won't make a difference even though she should know Albertans are struggling, why is this government

doing nothing to assist Albertans to cope with the affordability crisis, starting with a little relief at the pumps?

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, you've got to ask yourself, as negative a picture that they try to paint about the current circumstance in Alberta, why do people keep moving here and voting with their feet? To pursue the Alberta advantage. This is the 60-day average fuel price. We're number one. You know, that's a little sneak. B.C.: 26 cents higher. Saskatchewan: 4 cents higher. Manitoba: 3 cents higher. Ontario: 10 cents higher. Quebec: 21 cents higher. We're going to do this the right way, the responsible way.

2:40

### Highway 14 Capital Plan

**Ms Lovely:** Highway 14 is an important route for residents of the Camrose constituency and surrounding rural communities, connecting families, seniors, workers, and farmers to jobs, health care, and regional services. Many residents access it through highway 26, and it carries a heavy mix of agricultural, commuter, commercial traffic. Since 2019 this stretch has seen over 1,600 collisions and, sadly, 12 fatalities and more than 70 injury-causing incidents. How is the ministry working with communities to improve safety on highway 14?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors.

**Mr. Dreeshen:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, any loss of life on our roads is very serious and something the department does a very thorough investigation of to see the cause of accidents. We do everything that we can to try to prevent future accidents. I would like to thank the Member for Camrose for her advocacy on highway 14 and so many other projects in her riding. We know that if we make the proper investments at the right time, we can help prevent accidents. That's something that we'll continue to do as a government.

**The Speaker:** Camrose.

**Ms Lovely:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that response. Given that constituents frequently raise concerns about the large truck congestion and limited safe passing opportunities on highway 14, also given that families, communities, and farmers are sharing the same two lanes, which can lead to some frustration, and further given that passing lanes are a proven way to reduce pressure and improve safety on busy rural highways, to the minister: has the ministry considered additional passing lanes on highway 14, and how is the corridor reflected in current safety planning?

**Mr. Dreeshen:** We have conducted, Mr. Speaker, a passing lane study for 10 kilometres on highway 14 just west of Tofield, and this passing lane study was prepared to assess the needs for passing improvements on highway 14 and to determine potential locations for passing lanes where they, obviously, would be feasible. McElhanney is our design consultant on this project, and we're hoping to get it done on time and on budget.

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

**Ms Lovely:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister. Given that highway 14 is not only a local connector but an important agricultural and trade corridor supporting grain hauling, livestock movement, and commercial transport across eastern Alberta and into Saskatchewan and given that for Alberta's agricultural and trade sectors to remain strong, transportation

infrastructure must keep pace with increased use, again to the minister: how will our government ensure future investments reflect the safety needs and economic importance of corridors like highway 14?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Dreeshen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, on highway 14 range roads 192 and 191 are two very important intersections that we're looking at improving. For the range road 192 intersection we're looking at a turn lane that'll actually be wider, that'll improve the longevity of that intersection. On range road 191 we're looking at having a dedicated westbound lane that will have a right-turn lane. Obviously, this will improve the safety in this region. Again, I would thank the member for her advocacy for Camrose, for all of these important provincial projects in her riding.

**The Speaker:** Well, normally at this point I would say that we're waiting for 30 seconds to continue with the daily Routine, but we are at Orders of the Day.

## Orders of the Day

### Government Motions

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

#### Select Special Committee on Electoral Boundaries

37. Mr. Schow moved:

A. Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly recognize that

- (a) the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission's final report, which was tabled by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly on March 26, 2026, Sessional Paper 436/2025-26, makes recommendations to the Legislative Assembly as to the area, boundaries, and names of the electoral divisions of Alberta, referred to as the final report,
- (b) on the tabling of the final report, the commission appointed under section 2 of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act is concluded,
- (c) the final report includes input from Albertans provided through written proposals and public hearings held across Alberta,
- (d) the final report includes a majority report, an addendum to the majority report, and a minority report,
- (e) the majority report notes that since the last Electoral Boundaries Commission report in 2017 the population of Alberta has increased by over 800,000 people and that in responding to these changes, the Legislature expanded the number of available seats by two, from 87 to 89,
- (f) the majority report notes that the size of the Legislative Assembly was only increased by 2 per cent despite the population increasing by 20 per cent,
- (g) the majority report expresses regret that the commission had to remove two ridings from central and north-central Alberta in order to address this population increase,
- (h) the majority report states that the majority of the commission believes that it would have been

- able to provide Albertans with more effective representation had the Legislature provided an additional two seats and indicates that, had the commission been given the power to do so, it may have proposed a map of at least 91 electoral divisions,
- (i) the addendum to the majority report
- (i) proposes that if the Legislative Assembly cannot concur in the majority report's recommendation to remove two electoral divisions from areas outside of the cities of Edmonton and Calgary, the Legislative Assembly consider amending the Electoral Divisions Act for the purpose of increasing the number of electoral divisions for the next general election from 89 to 91,
- (ii) proposes that the matter be referred to an all-party select special committee or other legislative committee, and
- (iii) in its four additional recommendations cited as recommendation 5(a) to (d), provides recommendations to protect certain proposed electoral divisions described in the majority report from substantive alteration stemming from the addition of two additional electoral divisions, and
- (j) section 3 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees that every citizen of Canada has the right to vote in an election of members of the House of Commons or of a Legislative Assembly and to be qualified for membership therein, which includes a right to effective representation;
- B. And be it further resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce a bill to amend section 13 of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act to provide for 91 proposed electoral divisions;
- C. And be it further resolved that
- (a) a Select Special Committee on Electoral Boundaries be established to oversee an independent review of electoral boundaries of Alberta
- (i) on an expedited basis, and
- (ii) without a requirement to direct the holding of public hearings,
- (b) the committee consists of the following:
- (i) Mr. Lundy as the chair of the committee;
- (ii) three members of the government caucus nominated by the Government House Leader, the nominations of which are to be submitted to the chair;
- (iii) two members of the opposition caucus nominated by the Opposition House Leader, the nominations of which are to be submitted to the chair,
- (c) the committee is constituted on the nomination of a majority of its members and continues despite any vacancies in its membership,
- (d) the committee be directed to engage independent advisors
- (i) to serve on an independent advisory panel to carry out the mandate referred to in clause (e), and
- (ii) who are to be appointed by the committee as follows:
- (A) a chair of the independent advisory panel who must be one of the following.
- (I) the president of a post-secondary educational institution in Alberta;
- (II) a judge or retired judge of any court of Alberta;
- (III) a person whose stature and qualifications are similar to those of the persons referred to in subparagraphs (I) and (II);
- (B) on nomination of the Leader of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition in consultation with the leaders of other opposition parties represented in the Legislative Assembly, two persons who are not members of the Legislative Assembly;
- (C) on nomination of the President of the Executive Council, two persons who are not members of the Legislative Assembly;
- (D) with respect to the persons appointed under paragraph (B), one must be a resident in a city and the other resident outside a city at the time of their appointment;
- (E) with respect to the persons appointed under paragraph (C), one must be a resident in a city and the other resident outside a city at the time of their appointment;
- (F) all persons appointed under paragraphs (A), (B) and (C) must be Canadian citizens, residents of Alberta, and at least 18 years of age.
- (e) the independent advisory panel's mandate is to
- (i) conduct a review of the electoral boundaries of Alberta and make proposals as to the area, boundaries, and names of the electoral divisions of Alberta.
- (ii) in conducting its review,
- (A) divide the electoral boundaries of Alberta into 91 proposed electoral divisions
- (B) incorporate the recommendations provided in recommendation 5 in the addendum to the majority report subject to any modifications the independent advisory panel considers necessary, taking into consideration the requirement for effective representation as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and
- (I) sparsity, density, and rate of growth of the population

- (II) communities of interest, including municipalities, regional and rural communities, Indian reserves and Métis settlements,
- (III) geographical features,
- (IV) the availability and means of communication and transportation between various parts of Alberta,
- (V) the desirability of understandable and clear boundaries, and
- (VI) any other factors the independent advisory panel considers appropriate, and
- (C) ensure that its proposals comply with the following requirements:
  - (I) the population of a proposed electoral division must not be more than 25 per cent above nor more than 25 per cent below the average population of all the proposed electoral divisions;
  - (II) despite subparagraph (I), in the case of no more than four of the proposed electoral divisions, if the independent advisory panel is of the opinion that at least three of the following criteria exist in a proposed electoral division, the proposed electoral division may have a population that is as much as 50 per cent below the average population of all the proposed electoral divisions:
    1. the area of the proposed electoral division exceeds 20,000 square kilometres or the total surveyed area of the proposed electoral division exceeds 15,000 square kilometres;
    2. the distance from the Legislature Building in Edmonton to the nearest boundary of the proposed electoral division by the most direct highway route is more than 150 kilometres;
    3. there is no town in the proposed electoral division that has a population exceeding 8,000 people;
    4. the area of the proposed electoral division contains an Indian reserve or a Métis settlement;
    5. the proposed electoral division has a portion of its boundary co-terminous with a boundary of the province of Alberta;
- (III) for the purpose of the third criterion set out in subparagraph (II), the municipality of Crowsnest Pass is not a town,
- (iii) conduct its review despite any vacancies in its membership,
- (iv) on or before October 22, 2026, submit to the committee a report based on its review, and
- (v) on the independent advisory panel submitting its report to the committee, the independent advisory panel's mandate is concluded,
- (f) for the purposes of the independent advisory panel carrying out its mandate the committee may, at the request of and on behalf of the independent advisory panel, do any of the following:
  - (i) request access to and the use of any information and statistics that the independent advisory panel considers relevant to its mandate, including any information and statistics gathered and input received by the Electoral Boundaries Commission most recently appointed under the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, and any records held by the Legislative Assembly Office;
  - (ii) request advice, information and assistance from the office of the Chief Electoral Officer;
  - (iii) request any person to provide the independent advisory panel with advice that the independent advisory panel considers advisable or necessary;
  - (iv) direct the Legislative Assembly Office to provide administrative support to the independent advisory panel as required,
- (g) the committee be authorized to pay the following:
  - (i) remuneration and travelling and living expenses of the independent advisors as it relates to carrying out the independent advisory panel's mandate;
  - (ii) reasonable disbursements incurred by the independent advisory panel for the effective conduct of its responsibilities,
- (h) if the independent advisory panel submits more than one report to the committee, the report of a majority of the members of the independent advisory panel is the report of the independent advisory panel, but if there is no majority, the

- report of the chair is the report of the independent advisory panel,
- (i) as soon as practicable after receiving the independent advisory panel's report the committee
    - (i) may convene to review the report, including making observations in respect of the report, and
    - (ii) on conclusion of its review, if any, must submit the report to the Legislative Assembly no later than November 2, 2026,
  - (j) the committee continues despite a prorogation of a session and may, without leave of the Legislative Assembly, meet during a period when the Legislative Assembly is adjourned or prorogued, and
  - (k) on the committee submitting the report to the Legislative Assembly, the committee's mandate is concluded.

**Mr. Schow:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon we'll hear a lot of discussion about this motion. Likely, a lot of that is not factually accurate, and by that I mean coming from the members opposite, of course. I guess I have to clarify that. What you're going to hear from the opposition, I would say, would be a misinterpretation of the facts.

As such, I'd like to take an opportunity to read this motion in its entirety so that all members are aware of its contents. First, I'll briefly comment on the motion. While a government motion, it's simply the means by which this matter may be brought forward to the Assembly for discussion. This motion is supported by our entire caucus, and I know that some of our private members will be taking the time to speak to that effect.

I presume that members opposite intend to oppose this motion. However, what is most important to me is that all members of this Assembly have the opportunity at some point to discuss the importance of effective representation, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to hearing this debate.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move Government Motion 37.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, the hon. Government House Leader has moved Government Motion 37. Does anybody care to speak to the government motion? The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

**Mr. Nenshi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for this opportunity to talk – I apologize in advance – in some detail about this motion and precisely why we find it so objectionable. I'm going to tell the story of what has happened with this commission and give folks a sense of what is going on forward. In fact, I'm going to talk about seven different things today: the unfairness of the process in the past and going forward, including the lack of public consultation; how gerrymandering in this proposal is unfair to both rural and urban Albertans; how what the Premier has been claiming about the recommendations in the existing report is not accurate; about the challenges to Elections Alberta to implement such a late report this fall; on what Albertans have already said about why this process is not appropriate; about why the UCP won't just take the simple answer and reappoint the existing commission to look at the question of two further seats; and why the Premier's staff and others having access to the maps in advance of the release of the minority report highlights the political pressure that was placed on a supposedly independent committee.

My colleagues and I will talk about that over the course of debate today, over the course of this motion because this is important. It's uncommon for the opposition to stand up and talk so much about a government motion. It's not a bill, it's not a law, but what it is is antithetical to democracy. What we're seeing before us is something that's never been tried before by any Canadian Parliament, by any Canadian Legislature. It takes its cues from gerrymandering in the United States, and, no, that's not an insult to the United States. I'm sorry if the Government House Leader feels that every time we mention the United States we're insulting them. It is an insult to an antidemocratic process, an antidemocratic process that courts and legislators in the United States have found to be unconstitutional until recent times, and antithetical, in fact, to a process that the Supreme Court of Canada has found to be critical to our Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

In section 3 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms voting rights are sacrosanct. Every citizen has the right to have their voice heard. Every citizen needs to understand that when they go to the polling booth, their vote matters, that their vote is not going to be diluted with the vote of somebody who lives hundreds of kilometres away or that their vote is not being taken for granted by a Conservative government who says: no matter what we do to you, you're going to vote for us anyway. It's not fair and it's not right. And, fundamentally, it is not Canadian.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

When my parents moved to this country, they knew they would have a lot of struggle. They knew that not everything would be here for them easily. They knew that they would work hard, and they knew that they wouldn't always have an easy life. But they sure as heck didn't think that they'd have to worry about the state of democracy in Canada. They sure as heck didn't think that when they went to the polling booth, their vote didn't matter. That's what they were coming from. That's what they were trying to escape. And when we say that there's an Alberta advantage and people come here for freedom, it's not just words, Mr. Speaker. It's truly what we believe and what we have to be able to do.

3:00

Let's talk about what happened with this report. When the Minister of Justice first stood in this House – I was not yet an elected member then, but I was watching from up there – and passed the legislation, which was only a little bit over a year ago, setting up this boundaries commission, it was already kind of fishy. There were some weird things in that legislation. One of them was not allowing the commission to determine how many seats were needed to accommodate for population change.

At that point I think the Premier had already read on Twitter that the population of Alberta had gone up, and she had sort of stopped saying we should double Alberta's population in a year, but she hadn't yet gone to full on anti-immigrant. But the government certainly knew that not only had the population of Alberta increased significantly but that population growth had already cratered so that we were not seeing the same kind of growth. With that knowledge, with that understanding, with the famous 600,000 people who came to Alberta that the Premier always talks about already here, the government chose to only increase the size of the Legislature by two seats.

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

**The Acting Speaker:** Point of order.

## Point of Order Exhibits

**Mr. Williams:** It's unfortunate that I have to rise on a point of order with the members standing immediately behind the Leader of the Opposition attempting to use a prop during the speech. A speech can be made very simply with the content without the use of a prop. We know that this is inappropriate use in the Chamber. We want to have the clipability for the Leader of the Opposition; I have no interest in interrupting. However, the prop is clearly breaking the standing orders and the decorum of this House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you.

Opposition, I can't hear you from your chair there.

**Mr. Sabir:** I think it's not a point of order. The member I see behind the Leader of the Official Opposition has the boundaries commission report that's the subject of discussion this afternoon. I think the Deputy Government House Leader needs to find some more creative way to interrupt the Leader of the Official Opposition. It's not a point of order. It's a document that was handed to all of us, and having that on the desk cannot be a prop.

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you for the submissions.

I am going to ask the member if the member is reading the document or if the member is just having it there as a prop.

**Mr. Kasawski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm both reading it and holding it up.

**The Acting Speaker:** In that regard, I will ask the member to read it with the booklet flat on his desk to not utilize it in a way that causes disruption in the Chamber. Thank you.

The opposition leader may proceed.

## Debate Continued

**Mr. Nenshi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And fair warning to the deputy House leader across: I'm going to be reading from it shortly, and it will be in my hands because the font is really small.

All of that said, we're going back to that day when the government passed the motion to set up the independent commission. At that time my colleagues on this side of the House asked the question about adding more politicians. We asked the question about why that arbitrary number of 89, that small increase versus the increase to the population, was put in place, and the answer was very clear.

The answer was that the population growth in Alberta, the 600,000 people that the Premier often talks about, which had already happened by that point, was not uniform across the province. Much as I would love it if those folks moved to Barrhead, much as the Premier would have loved it if all those folks moved to Red Deer because she wants Red Deer to go from 100,000 to a million people somehow, the vast majority of that population growth was in the cities of Calgary and Edmonton. In particular, it was in neighbourhoods in Calgary and Edmonton that are growing much, much faster than the average. Coincidentally or not, those neighbourhoods tend to vote for the opposition in very large numbers. So it was actually very clear that the government themselves restricted the growth of the Alberta Legislature to only two new seats because they didn't want Edmonton and Calgary to get more seats.

That would have been the answer, to give more seats in suburban Edmonton and suburban Calgary and central Calgary, as a matter

of fact, leaving the rural seats roughly the same, but the government didn't want that. They wanted to make sure that Edmonton and Calgary voters' voices were diluted, so they tried a few things in that legislation. They restricted the number of seats. They then removed the requirement, the long-standing requirement that with the exception of small variances, the borders of Calgary and Edmonton had to be held firm. Only Calgary and Edmonton. They removed that requirement so that the commission could create these massive hybrid seats.

They did all of this, Mr. Speaker. It was very clear what they were trying to do. They take a lot of their thoughts, they take a lot of their ideas from the United States and from Donald Trump, and it was very clear at that time that in the United States the Republicans were already attempting to undertake massive gerrymandering. They were creating snake-shaped jurisdictions. The government of Texas very clearly had said already at that time that they were going to create a map to put five more Republicans into the house of Congress. That is where the UCP often takes its cues.

So from the very beginning of this we got nervous. We watched this process very carefully. It was also very clear from the grin on the face of the Minister of Justice when he appointed the chair of the committee that they thought they had this in the bag. We appointed two members. They appointed three members. There would be a 3 to 2 vote. They would get the gerrymandered maps that they wanted. What they didn't count on was Albertans. They didn't count on the thousands of Albertans who came forward and said: don't mess with our maps. They didn't count on the thousands of Albertans who made written and oral submissions saying: we believe in free and fair elections; you shouldn't have to cheat to win. They didn't count on that moving not one but all three of their members on that commission to putting forward free and fair maps. Not what the UCP wanted.

I remember the day in this House when the interim report was tabled. I remember we were all a little nervous because we didn't know what was going to happen. The interim reports hit our desks. I was looking at my colleagues going, "Guys, you've got work to do; stop reading the report," but we were all reading the report. In question period that day we had asked the minister, who apparently had not yet seen the report: what are you going to do? He said that it's an independent report with independent members, and we will adopt the independent commission's report. Then he read it, and then he realized that all of the UCP appointees to that commission had in fact voted for free and fair maps. You could see the government scrambling in real time to try and figure out what to do. They knew they couldn't say anything about the interim report, but they knew that they could influence the final report.

Public hearings happened again in January, shortened public hearings, and we watched them. We watched every one of them. The poor Member for Edmonton-Glenora I think watched every second of every public hearing to see what was going on. Again, hundreds of Albertans submitted written submissions. Hundreds of Albertans showed up at these public hearings. It was almost exactly the same as in the fall, something I've never actually seen before, which is that lots of Albertans showed up and actually said: "I've got no complaints. I'm here to thank the commission for doing their job. These maps look fine." Normally people don't show up at open houses to say that things are fine. They just show up if they're upset about something. We were proud of the commission, and Albertans were proud of the commission.

But something odd was happening. A tiny number of people who showed up at these public hearings came with these very strange maps. They were all in the same font. They were all in the same style. The constituencies that they showed were probably illegal and unconstitutional. Weird. They were all exactly the same. And

then a few MLAs showed up at the public hearings, which is their right, and they showed maps that they would approve, and weirdly, they were all in the same font, they were all in the same style, and they all looked the same as the reports that these individual citizens had brought forward.

3:10

Now, today the Premier told us that, well, they just used AI. They all happened to use the same AI to create this. But one of them made a little mistake, Mr. Speaker. They forgot to take off the government of Alberta document identifier, which shows that all of these maps were created by government using taxpayer resources to influence a supposedly independent commission. I'm going to come back to that, but what clearly was happening is that the government woke up to the fact that they didn't have the commission in the bag, that the members of the commission were being free and fair in their work, and that the government wasn't going to get what they wanted, so they started to apply enormous political pressure.

An interview with one of the independent boundaries commission members, one of our appointees, who was the former mayor of Sylvan Lake – we just really tried hard to appoint thoughtful, smart people, nonpartisan, to this commission. We, in fact, appointed as our other member the leader of a different political party. He's never joined the NDP. He's never had a membership to the NDP. But we know that he knows maps really well, having been the former chair of the Calgary Metropolitan Region Board.

Susan Samson, one of our appointees: I don't know her very well, but she was the mayor of Sylvan Lake. She seems to be a brilliant, smart, thoughtful person who believes in rural Alberta and what it means to live as a rural Albertan. She said in the press this weekend that something very strange happened, that the UCP-appointed commissioners, who had got along with the commission the entire time, who had voted alongside with the commission in the interim report, at the end of the public hearings stopped talking to the other commissioners about what they should get done. They stopped compromising. They stopped working together, and the chair of the commission is on record as saying that he just wanted a unanimous report. It says in his recommendations that he was telling everyone to put a little "water in [their] wine" and start to compromise, and Susan Samson tells us that just stopped happening.

The UCP commissioners went to ground, and then suddenly a couple of weeks later they wrote a minority report that had never been discussed by the majority. In the chair's addendum he talks about how if they had just tried to convince him, he might even have gone for the hybridization of Lethbridge, but they didn't even try. They went to ground. They showed up with a minority report that they had created in two or three weeks without any support from the commission or the commission staff that somehow had an incomplete set of maps in it that were, shockingly, the same style, the same fonts, and the same gerrymandered maps that used to have a government identifier on them.

Regardless of where you sit on the benches opposite, I have a lot of respect for anyone who puts their name up to get elected. It's a hard thing to do. But every one of us wants to run in a free and fair election. None of us want to cheat. None of us want to rig an election just so we can win, and the fact that my colleagues opposite are forced to sit in this House while their leadership is clearly doing something they don't even know about in order to be able to influence an independent process should offend every one of them because this is how the UCP treats rural Albertans. It takes them for granted. This is how the government treats its own caucus, taking it for granted, thinking that they'll just go along to get along with whatever things the UCP leadership wants to do. If I tried that on

these guys, I wouldn't last very long in this job, but that seems to be how things are done over there, and it's a big problem.

Where does that leave us? The Premier and the Government House Leader would want us to think that the process that they've put forward is just a minor thing. It's just a matter of adding a couple more seats. It's no big deal; we don't need to do any more public hearings. But this is actually a significant problem, and I'd like to go through and talk about some of the reasons that it is a problem.

Number one is that it is an unfair process that explicitly says that we don't want to hear from the public, we don't want to do any public hearings, which strongly says that the deal is already in, that the fix is in. This is a big problem because this is not a small issue. The Premier, I think, wants us to believe – maybe she wants her caucus to believe – that all we're doing is putting back the two rural ridings. We're putting back Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre; we're putting back Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland. That is not possible, Mr. Speaker. It actually can't happen like that. Already three rural ridings in the current map are below the threshold set by the Supreme Court. The legislation allows for a maximum of three or, in specialized cases, four. If they add in two more ridings, both of which will be far below the population average, not only is that ethically questionable; it means that the vote of someone in Calgary or someone in Sherwood Park counts for half as much as the vote of someone in Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. That's ethically dubious, but it's also illegal and it's likely unconstitutional.

In fact, the majority warns of that. They say that trying to do something like that would likely offend section 3 of the Charter. Section 3, by the way, is so sacrosanct it cannot be overturned by the notwithstanding clause. It's explicitly removed from what you can do with the notwithstanding clause, which means we're going to be in court for years, spending a ton of taxpayers' money defending something that is, in fact, unconstitutional.

Let's just be clear; 1,147 written submissions to the Electoral Boundaries Commission, 47 hearings in public and virtual, and now we're saying that we don't want to hear from citizens anymore, that this is wrong. This lack of public consultation in and of itself, if nothing else were true, makes the process going forward illegitimate.

Now, it's been clear for some time that the goal here is to dilute the voices of people in Calgary and Edmonton. In fact, the UCP-authored minority report goes even further. It removes Lethbridge and Red Deer from the map entirely. Already in the Premier's own riding the people of Medicine Hat are split in two. The people in her half of the riding share a riding with people 180 kilometres away who will never go to Medicine Hat – they'll go to Calgary for things that they need – yet the Premier claims this is a fair riding.

The UCP-authored minority report would try to do that to people in northeast Calgary where I live, that we would share a riding with people 60 or 80 kilometres away. My colleague the MLA for Calgary-Foothills somehow would have a riding that includes, if you know Calgary, Nolan Hill and Bragg Creek. Those things are nowhere near one another and they have an entire city between them, but somehow we've managed to draw a riding in the UCP-authored minority report that includes both of them.

It's very clear that this not only is insulting to people in urban Alberta – in the big cities, in Red Deer, and in Lethbridge – saying, "Your vote doesn't matter"; it's also really insulting to people in rural Alberta. It's basically saying to the people in between Nolan Hill and Bragg Creek: "What you care about doesn't matter. Your MLA will be fighting for the green line north segment, which you will never see in your life. We know you're going to vote Conservative no matter what, so it doesn't matter. We'll just throw you in with these guys. Do us a solid. Never mind that you won't

have an MLA standing up for you. You're going to vote for us anyway." That is deeply insulting to the people of rural Alberta. It is deeply unfair to the people of rural Alberta.

Let's be clear. This government takes rural Alberta for granted. Your ER is closed? Drive an hour to another one. You're a pregnant woman and you want to deliver your baby in your own community? Sorry. No ob-gyn service. You want better highways? We have backbench members of the opposition forever just begging the minister of transportation to fix their highway. Nah. You're going to vote for us anyway. Even if your school is losing population, even if you're worried that your school might not stay open, your classrooms still have 40 kids in them because we can't attract and retain teachers in rural schools. That's how the UCP takes rural Alberta for granted. They can't even fix the roads, let alone the public services that are needed in those areas.

The UCP's ill-advised moratorium on renewables: you can argue about it as a climate plan as much as you want, but here's the thing. Where did that cost thousands of jobs? In places like Cardston county. That moratorium so that the Premier and her government could virtue signal on the climate cost economic development and thousands of jobs in rural Alberta. Those investments weren't going into downtown Calgary. The UCP takes rural Alberta for granted, thinking they're going to vote for them anyway and it doesn't matter.

I want to go to the recommendations in the actual report, if I may, for a moment. The Premier keeps saying that there were three sets of recommendations: a majority report, a minority report, and an addendum. That's not exactly right. There was one recommendation from the report. That was a recommendation from the majority. It's signed by the majority on page 65, and it says: we recommend the maps and the report in their totality. In fact, the exact words are: "the majority are confident that our report of 89 electoral divisions will be accepted and implemented by the Legislative Assembly."

3:20

Now, that report was written before the commission members had ever seen the minority report. Once the minority report came through with the same font and the same style that government MLAs were using for their maps, it alarmed the commission chair so much that he felt that the Legislature might adopt the minority report. He felt the need to write this addendum. He's not shy in this report about saying why he wrote the addendum. He says:

Due to my deep concern regarding the unconstitutionality and administrative law problems of the minority report . . .

This was a reaction to the minority report.

. . . I find it necessary to make [another] further recommendation that my fellow Commissioners cannot consent to . . . My majority colleagues do not agree with me on this point. That is why I am alone in making this recommendation.

He makes it very clear that this is not his preferred recommendation. He actually says that in the case that the Legislature cannot adopt the majority report, please don't adopt the minority report that the UCP wrote; please adopt this instead. But here's the thing. This Legislature was never given the chance to vote on the majority report. His recommendation was only supposed to kick in if the Legislature rejected the majority report, but the government fails to allow us to even vote. He literally says in recommendation 5, that the Government House Leader quoted a few moments ago: "in the circumstance that the Legislative Assembly of Alberta finds . . . it cannot concur in the proposals of the majority," et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Well, we were never even given the chance to, right? They're talking about recommendation 5 as though it was a recommendation and not a

conditional recommendation, a recommendation that was only supposed to show up at the last moment.

I gave the Premier a chance today in question period to see if she would actually accept the rest of his recommendation. The rest of his recommendation says: leave everything south of Airdrie alone, including the city of Calgary; leave everything north of the North Saskatchewan River in Edmonton alone; leave everything south of the North Saskatchewan River in Edmonton alone, with one small exception to Edmonton-South. He makes it very clear that we have to hold on to the boundaries in Calgary and Edmonton. I actually asked the Premier today if she was willing to do that, and she was unwilling to answer that question.

The fix is in, Mr. Speaker. This is not what this government wants. They're going to try one more time. They failed to do it by restricting the number of legislative seats, they failed to do it by allowing hybrid ridings, they failed to do it by what they thought was stacking the commission, and now they're going to try one more time to get their Trumplike map that they want. This really does matter. It sounds like stuff that political science nerds like me and the Member for Calgary-Mountain View will talk about late, late, late at night, but it matters to individuals. It matters to everyday Albertans every single day.

Elections Alberta has made it very clear. They cannot implement this map in the time period that they are given. They just can't. They say that they need a year and a half to two years in order to implement a map. In other words, this Legislature needs to pass the new maps in this session in order to hit the fixed election date in October 2027. They have to be able to update their computer systems, change their internal election management software, their public-facing websites. They have to plan for new polling stations. They have to hire new returning officers. They have to produce new forms, maps, and documents. They have to educate the public. They have to change everything. They don't have enough time.

Today the Premier insinuated that we'll just throw money at the problem. We'll give Elections Alberta way more money, and that'll solve the problem. Well, unless they're planning on interviewing polling officer candidates, you know, at 3 o'clock in the morning on a Tuesday, money is not going to fix the problem. It's time that is needed in order to fix the problem. Albertans deserve free and fair elections, not rushed, gerrymandered elections.

There is not one person in public who has actually said that they're in support of what the UCP is doing. It's remarkable, this incredible, wide range of folks who've written letters to the editor and op-eds and done interviews about why this is wrong. You know, David Climenhaga from St. Albert, who is always mad at me because I'm not left enough, says that this is just a plan to cheat, pure and simple. Ricky Leong in the *Calgary Sun*, who has never been too mad at me because I'm not left enough, says: "By inserting itself in a process in which it should have no part, one can't help but wonder what ulterior motives lurk behind this subversion of the democratic process." Duane Bratt, an esteemed political scientist who the Government House Leader tried to insult today because he doesn't like what he has to say, says very cleanly: "It is not an arm's-length process whose purpose is to find the best, balanced, and fair boundaries, but likely a deliberate attempt to manipulate ridings to the benefit of the UCP." So people on the left don't like it; people on the right don't like it; people who believe in politics don't like it.

Here's a big long list of people. Anne McLellan, Peggy Garrity, Marie Gordon, and Doug Stollery, huge pillars of the Edmonton community all four wrote . . .

**An Hon. Member:** The legal community.

**Mr. Nenshi:** And the Edmonton legal community. Thank you, Member. Well, yeah. Anne McLellan, of course, was the federal Minister of Justice.

We urge the government to accept the majority report in its entirety. This is the only option to guard against partisan interference that would secure an [elective] advantage for one party over another. To do otherwise invites litigation, unprecedented concern about the independence of the commission, loss of trust in basic [election] fairness, and a radical rejection of the voices of many Albertans who took time to weigh in on the redesign of the electoral map.

The mayor of Red Deer, Cindy Jefferies: “The initial proposal was to have Red Deer remain as [it] is, and we didn’t have any issues with that.” Mayor of Calgary, Jeromy Farkas, quote: I would strongly urge the province to just accept the majority report’s recommendations and findings in full. Andrew Knack, mayor of Edmonton, supporting the comments of Mayor Farkas. The Civil Liberties Association. Remember, the Premier used to call herself a libertarian. The Civil Liberties Association are her people, and this is what they said.

The Alberta government’s unusual involvement with the electoral map revision process erodes public confidence in the electoral system.

The process should include public consultations, be transparent from beginning to end, and elected officials should respect its outcome . . .

We urge the Alberta government to adopt an approach that considers the inherent conflict of interest faced by elected officials in matters of electoral boundary delimitation, and that respects citizens’ constitutional right to effective representation.

Now, the Premier and the Government House Leader have continually said: this is no big deal; we’re just adding two more seats. If that were the case and if you wanted us to quiet down a little bit, the easiest thing in the world would be just to appoint the same five people to this new panel. They’ve travelled across the province for a year, they know the maps better than anybody, and they will be able to quickly tell you if you can just add two new rural seats without messing everything else up. They know this the best, so reappoint all five of them. Even reappoint the UCP commissioners who wrote that ridiculous minority report with the government’s help. Reappoint them all. If you reappoint them all, then at least you can gain back a little bit of trust of Albertans that there is something whatsoever independent about this process. The Premier said, “But they’re exhausted” without actually having talked to them, without actually having asked them if they’re willing to take on this work again, which tells you, again, that this is being cooked up in somebody’s kitchen, which is not an independent kitchen.

Of course, that reminds us of the fact that a staffer in the Premier’s office, a fellow who has been fined three times by Elections Alberta for unscrupulous behaviour, someone who we know very well in northeast Calgary as someone who always runs for every right-wing party and always loses – six to 10 days before the House had those maps, he was showing the minority report maps all around northeast Calgary, looking for support in his own nomination on ridings that don’t exist, saying: “We created this riding for me. Will you buy a membership so I win the nomination?” That’s what this government is doing, and they’re not even good at it. It’s so easy for us to find all of this stuff out because it’s so obvious.

Whether it’s cheating, whether it’s rigging, whether it’s stealing, whether it’s gerrymandering, it’s not fair, and at the end of this day we are willing to fight an election any day on a fair map. We’re ready to fight a free and fair election. We’re ready to win. If the government thinks we can’t win, call an election now on a free and

fair map. If you’re confident in your record, if you’re confident that you’ve been a good government for Albertans, if you’re confident that Albertans support you in all the work you’re doing, call an election on a free and fair map. You don’t need to cheat to win.

**3:30**

This government’s fatal flaw, Mr. Speaker – it’s always been their fatal flaw – is that they don’t think Albertans are smart enough to know what they’re doing. The problem is that the government is not very smart about it. They think they’re playing 4D Vulcan chess when they’re throwing the checkerboard off the table when they don’t like the results. What they’re doing is obvious. It’s obvious to everyone. Albertans are smarter than that. Albertans know why the government is doing this. They know that the government is scared of running on its own record. They know this government is scared and has no respect for democracy. They know this government is ultimately scared of Albertans. Albertans deserve so much better.

For all their talk of referenda and direct democracy it’s clear that this government doesn’t care about democracy. This government won’t change laws to make things easier for themselves. They won’t reduce the gas tax. They won’t do consultations on daylight saving time. They’ll ignore a referendum on daylight saving time because they want to distract from their gerrymandering. That’s what they think about democracy. They’re spending nearly \$100 million, that should be in ERs and classrooms, on the Premier’s pet referenda, that she’s already put motions in the House about before hearing from Albertans.

On their last referendum on daylight saving time they just ignored the results. We know that these referenda don’t matter. We know that the Premier and the government are going to ignore the results and do whatever is politically advantageous to them because that’s what they’ve always done. That’s their record. This time, today, Albertans have stood up. Albertans have stood up on a boring topic like democracy and democratic reform and electoral boundaries, and they’ve said to this government: you’ve gone too far.

Getting back to my parents. They came here for economic opportunity. They came here because they knew their kids would have great public education. They came here because they knew if, God forbid, somebody became sick, it wouldn’t financially ruin the family because there is public health care.

The UCP is fond of saying that people come to Alberta for the freedom. Well, this is a government, led by a so-called libertarian, that systematically has stripped away people’s freedoms from the moment they were elected. They’ve taken away freedom for kids, for parents, for health care workers. They’ve taken away freedom from strikers. They’ve taken away freedom from teachers. And now they’re poised to take away the most important freedom of all, the freedom to choose our own government, and that is why we oppose this motion.

**The Acting Speaker:** The Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

**Mr. Lundy:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak in support of Motion 37 because this motion is intended to make sure Albertans are effectively represented in this Legislature. As we know, Alberta is growing quickly. Anyone who lives in our communities can see it. We talk about it almost every day in this Chamber. New neighbourhoods are being built, families are moving in, and regions that were once small are now expanding quicker than ever. That growth is a good thing, but it also brings added responsibility to this Assembly. We have to make sure that our democratic system does not fall behind. To accomplish this, we need to ensure that each MLA represents a reasonable number of

people and that communities have a clear and effective voice in this Chamber.

Earlier this year the Electoral Boundaries Commission completed a detailed and independent review. They heard from Albertans across the province. They studied the population trends, community boundaries, and the challenges of representing both urban and rural areas. The commission made it very clear that they believed that they could have delivered better, more effective representation if they had been allowed to recommend two additional electoral divisions. In other words, they saw a problem and they pointed to a solution. This motion takes that concern seriously and acts on it.

Mr. Speaker, this motion proposes that we establish a select special committee that will engage an independent panel of advisers. That panel will take the commission's work and incorporate the recommendations made by Justice Dallas Miller in his addendum, specifically the recommendation to increase the number of electoral divisions from 89 to 91.

This motion hands the work over to an independent panel. Their job will be to review the existing report, apply the same principles that guide electoral boundary decisions, and come back with recommendations that reflect effective representation. They will follow the rules set out in legislation, they will consider population changes, and, most importantly, they will respect the principle of effective representation which is protected under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Mr. Speaker, we need to make sure communities are heard. We need to make sure that the individual and shared interests of rural, urban, and growing regions all have a voice that makes sense. Right now there's a concern raised by the commission itself that the current number of electoral divisions may not fully achieve that goal. Motion 37 addresses this concern by creating a process that is focused on getting this right; not rushing it or politicizing it, but taking the time to do the work properly.

I will say, Mr. Speaker, that it is disappointing to see the members opposite trying to turn this into a political issue when it is really about representation. Instead of working constructively on a solution, they've chosen to frame this in a way that risks undermining the confidence in a process that is clearly designed to establish and prioritize the independence of the advisory panel. Members opposite seem not to be aware that the recommendation to increase the number of divisions did not come from government; it came from the commission itself.

Mr. Speaker, when you step back and look at this, it really comes down to making sure the system works the way that people expect it to. Albertans in fast-growing communities should be confident that their MLA can actually keep up with the size and needs of their riding. At the same time, people in rural Alberta want to know that their communities aren't being stretched so large that their voices get lost. Those are both reasonable expectations. More broadly than that, Albertans expect that when they cast a vote, it matters. They should be confident that they have real, meaningful representation in this Legislature. That's what this motion is trying to protect. That's what effective representation looks like in practice, and that's exactly what Motion 37 is trying to achieve.

Mr. Speaker, this motion allows qualified independent experts to take a look at the work that's already been done and make adjustments where needed. That's a responsible way to handle something as important as electoral boundaries. We're not throwing out the commission's work; we're building on it. We're acknowledging that they raised a concern, and we're giving that concern the attention it deserves. I would hope that the members opposite can agree that when an independent commission tells us that there may be a better way to ensure fair representation, we should at least take the time to examine that properly.

We know the province is growing. We know representation is becoming more challenging in certain areas, and we've been given a clear recommendation on how to address that. The question really is: do we take this advice seriously, or do we set it aside? I believe we should take it seriously. I believe we should do the work now in a transparent way so that Albertans can have confidence in the outcome, and I believe Motion 37 gives us the right path to do exactly that.

Mr. Speaker, I would encourage all members of this Assembly to support this motion, support the committee, and support a democratic process that is focused on fairness, independence, and getting this right for all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Ms Pancholi:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Government Motion 37, particularly after the remarks from the member across the way. I have good news for the Member for Leduc-Beaumont. He said he was very interested in having an independent process by qualified individuals to assess the electoral maps of Alberta. The great news is that the government already did that. They already had an independent Electoral Boundaries Commission that follows the legislation that governs how electoral maps are drawn in this province, filled with five independent, qualified individuals who came up with a report. The issue here is that the government, this member, all the members on the government side, don't like that report, so they simply want to draw the boundaries themselves, and that is precisely what Government Motion 37 does.

3:40

Let us be clear. Government Motion 37 is illegitimate, undemocratic, and an example of the most cynical type of politics. For the first time in Canadian history, across this country, across any parliament or Legislature, a government will be throwing out electoral maps developed by a legislated, independent electoral boundary commission and replacing those maps with ones drawn and approved by one political party. That is precisely what Government Motion 37 does. It allows the electoral boundaries of Alberta to be drawn by the UCP.

Let's begin with the obvious. The UCP screwed up. In their arrogance they assumed that only creating two new ridings when they knew how much the population of Alberta had increased – trust me, there's nobody in this province who knows more about the population increase than the Premier. They knew how much the population had increased, specifically in Edmonton and Calgary, and they believed that they could ask the boundary commission to look at 89 seats, and they would have no choice but to deprive the people living in those cities of effective representation. Mr. Speaker, not only did the UCP not have a problem with the idea of stripping those people who live in the cities of effective representation; it was actually something that they prefer.

What the UCP didn't count on was that the boundary commission would do its job of creating a fair map with the 89 seats that the UCP gave to it. The UCP didn't realize that with not enough ridings to account for the hundreds of thousands of new Albertans in Calgary and Edmonton, the UCP had given the boundary commission no choice but to take seats from north-central and central Alberta to ensure effective representation for the cities. Sure, it would have been great if the UCP had given them 91 seats to work with, but they did not. All of the members on that side of the House voted in favour, just over a year ago, to only increasing the number of seats in Alberta by two, to 89 seats. That was a

decision that this government made. So, yes, the UCP now realizes that they screwed up, and they're using that mistake to now do what they always wanted to do in the first place, which is to draw the electoral maps themselves.

Let's be clear. There is only one report of the commission. It is the report and maps based on the 89 seats allocated to the commission by the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, which is signed off by the majority of the members of the commission. That same act says in section 9, "The report of a majority of the members of the Commission is the report of the Commission." The minority report is not the report, and neither is the chair's addendum, which the UCP relies heavily on to justify reopening electoral maps to add two more seats.

The chair explicitly – and we have to keep repeating this, Mr. Speaker, because the UCP continues to ignore the chair's own words. He says explicitly on page 66 of his addendum, "My majority colleagues do not agree with me on this point. That is why I am alone in making this recommendation." Mr. Speaker, reading comprehension should not be that challenging, but that means that the chair's addendum is not the report of the majority.

The chair goes further in his addendum on page 67 and states, "Lest there be any confusion about this issue, my writing this Addendum in no way detracts from the majority report representing the views of a majority of the Commission." I think, Mr. Speaker, the chair anticipated that the UCP would be easily confused, and he was correct. I will repeat again: the chair's addendum is not the majority report, and it is dishonest of this government to suggest that it is. The report of the commission is only the report signed off on by the three majority members of the commission: Chair Justice Miller, Greg Clark, and Susan Samson. Further, the majority report includes the maps developed by the majority. It is not just the recommendations. The majority refers to that on page 59, where they say, "The majority recommends the adoption of the majority report in its totality." The majority's report also concludes with this statement on page 65. "The majority are confident that our report of 89 electoral divisions will be accepted and implemented by the Legislative Assembly." That's it, Mr. Speaker. The only report that should be considered and put before this Assembly is the majority report on 89 electoral divisions.

But, of course, with the introduction of Government Motion 37 we know that the Premier and the UCP government are not even letting this House vote on the majority report. This is despite the fact that the Premier and the Minister of Justice stood in this House 10 times in the last three weeks and said that all MLAs would get to vote on the report of the independent boundary commission. Just one week ago the Premier said, "This Assembly is going to have an opportunity to vote for or against the report." On that same day the Minister of Justice said no less than six times a variation of the following.

Every single MLA in this Chamber deserves the opportunity to be able to debate and discuss and review the recommendations and the report in its entirety. The government does not draw electoral boundaries. It does not draw the maps.

It turns out, like so many other things, Mr. Speaker, that wasn't true.

Instead of voting on the report of the independent boundary commission, instead of even reconvening the independent boundary commission under the act, which is the only legislative process in which boundaries can be changed in Alberta, the government is setting up an illegitimate and undemocratic process where the UCP will redraw the electoral maps themselves. They're trying to fool Albertans into thinking that this convoluted process set out in Government Motion 37 is independent. You know, they throw the word "independent" in the motion a couple of times and try to mimic some of the language from the Electoral Boundaries

Commission Act, but it is not independent. The advisory panel they are setting up reports to a UCP majority committee. This is unlike the independent boundary commission, which reports to the Legislative Assembly, not the government. Any member who has sat on any committee of this House knows how partisan they are.

Under this process, not under legislation, the UCP decides what the mandate of these advisers will be and what kind of information these advisers can consider, and the UCP has given their advisers an incredibly broad mandate under Government Motion 37. It says to "conduct a review of the electoral boundaries of Alberta and make proposals as to the area, boundaries, and names of the electoral divisions of Alberta." This is a tell, Mr. Speaker. It means that no Albertan should be fooled into believing that the only changes the UCP committee will make will be to simply add back in the two seats in central and north-central Alberta that aren't in the majority report.

In fact, Government Motion 37 explicitly empowers the advisory panel to make any modifications they consider necessary to the chair's conditions around adding two more seats. If the UCP expects Albertans to just trust them on this, well, Mr. Speaker, we have almost three years of this Premier's actions to judge the UCP on, and trust is something they have irrevocably broken with the people of this province.

Even if the UCP was just going to add these two seats back into north-central and central Alberta, those changes will necessarily create cascading changes to other ridings. And this is where, once again, the process deviates from what was set out in the independent boundary commission. Unlike the boundary commission, the UCP committee process doesn't allow for interim new maps to be released and, more importantly, for public consultation on those draft maps. Allowing the public to provide feedback on proposed changes to ridings is one of the most fundamental aspects of an independent boundary review process, and that is simply not going to happen under the UCP's process.

Now let's talk about public consultation. Alberta's independent Electoral Boundaries Commission held extensive public consultations to develop the maps presented in the majority report. They held 28 hearings in 16 different locations, conducted two virtual hearings, and received 200 written submissions before even issuing the interim report with draft maps. They then received another 1,147 written submissions and held another series of online and in-person hearings before issuing its final report.

Now, let's contrast that to the process the UCP is setting out in Government Motion 37. While increasing the number of ridings to 91, which will have effects on multiple surrounding ridings, and also giving the advisory panel and the committee broad authority to make any other changes to electoral maps they consider necessary, while doing all that, the UCP have actually prohibited public consultation and hearings in their illegitimate process to redraw electoral maps. Maybe the UCP will argue that enough public consultation was already done by the boundary commission, so they don't need any more. But that public consultation was done by the boundary commission on a different set of maps developed on a different number of ridings. Or maybe the UCP will argue that they don't have the time to do public consultation on the maps they are drawing because, well, you know, that pesky election date is getting closer.

3:50

That means the UCP expects Albertans to believe that the mistake they made in not creating enough new ridings in the first place, something they did to further dilute the voices of urban voters, is now an excuse to bypass the public altogether. How convenient for the UCP. Find an excuse to draw the electoral maps

themselves and then – oops – run out of time to consult with Albertans about it. I mean, the feedback of Albertans has never meant much to the UCP in the first place, so I guess why start now?

There has never been a government in Canada with a more consistent and contemptuous approach to the people that they serve than this one. There has never been a government more willing to breach public trust, undermine democracy, and consolidate power than this one.

Mr. Speaker, in the clearest terms possible, every member of this Assembly, regardless of political party, needs to reject a partisan process for drawing electoral maps. This is not just another partisan dispute between the two political parties in this House. This is about the fragility and importance of democratic values and norms that will crumble if we don't all stand up for them, regardless of what party we represent. It's about Albertans having trust in those they elect to serve them and the process by which this House makes decisions that affect aspects of every person's life.

I urge every member of this Assembly to vote with their conscience and vote against unprecedented and undemocratic political interference in the electoral process. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker:** The Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services.

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was listening with interest to the hon. member's speech. I will quickly respond because I know there are other individuals who want to respond as well to this important motion. You know, it's another day ending in Y because we have the NDP again acting as if the sky is falling and freaking out and changing their position on the fly. They can't help themselves.

It is quite shocking if you take a little bit of time to go back and look at what the NDP actually said during this process that we're undertaking when it came to the boundary commission, including the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, who just spent a considerable amount of time in this Chamber saying that she did not want to see more seats added, did not think that this process needed to be in line with what Justice Miller suggested to be able to make sure we get the best representation we can. If you go back and look at her quote to the commission during the process, she said the exact opposite, which I think probably should tell you all you need to know about that hon. member and the NDP.

I'll give you a couple of quotes from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. January 21 *Hansard*, page EB-846:

There is no doubt that Alberta's electoral map requires more seats. As members of the Official Opposition myself and my colleagues raised concerns and voted against the government's Bill 31, which only allocated two new seats to the electoral map, on the basis that Alberta's population growth warranted much more than that.

Also, on January 21 she says,

I think, as I said, as an MLA my colleagues and I spoke very clearly about the fact that two additional ridings given the significant population increase we've seen in this province was simply just inadequate.

Sounds like she agrees with the justice.

She goes on to say:

I believe strongly that there could have been many more seats added to the electoral map that would have more fairly provided that distribution of population, which would have allowed for some rural ridings to not be changed or to be eliminated, but unfortunately the government made a choice of only two, which puts the very large cities competing with each other for a limited extra seat.

I'm going to give you another couple more quotes. I think they're actually interesting and in line with this. January 16, Justice Miller, who the Chamber seems to want to now ignore: "Part of the weaknesses or the limitations we have is that we only have two more ridings to deal with. You know, 87 to 89. Probably could have used six or seven more."

Greg Clark, who we heard from the Leader of the Opposition today saying that he did not want more seats, that he did not support Justice Miller's recommendations on how we could go through this process to get the best representation: I'll quote him on January 20 in *Hansard*. "If we had another two or four, these sorts of discussions would be a lot easier."

Susan Samson, another NDP appointee to the commission, who worked very hard on this process, who, again, the Official Opposition claimed today did not want to see more seats and that they somehow did not agree with Justice Miller's suggestion, said on January 14, "When we talk about more electoral districts, you know that we were only given two." How that could have come down as only two I don't know. Interesting.

Greg Clark again on January 20 says, "There are many things that we wish we had control over, that being one of them, perhaps having more than 89 seats to work with." The Legislature is going to give him his wish. It's good advice, I think, from Greg Clark, my former colleague in this Chamber.

January 12, Justice Miller again: "Unfortunately, we were not given a legislative pen to say: no, we don't want 89; we want 97 ridings. We're stuck with the 89, so that one option is very, very limited." Clearly, where the majority was at was to have a conversation about increasing capacity.

But do you know who else agreed with them? The MLA for Calgary-Beddington, who also on January 12 said this. "I do wish that we could have added more seats to the cities simply because of the population growth that we're having in our cities. But, again, you know, difficult choices had to be made by you folks, for sure." Sounds like she wanted more seats. I didn't hear that today.

Justice Miller, again on January 15: "Unfortunately, we were only given two more seats, from 87 to 89, so we don't have a lot of room to play with." Again, he would like to see more seats added.

On January 21 again the NDP-appointed Greg Clark, who, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Official Opposition said today did not want more seats, says, "We need the Legislature to give us more seats than [just the] two extra." Again, though, agreed with by the hon. members across the way, who seem to have forgotten.

On January 14 the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow says:

I think that if the commission wants to, in their report, suggest that: look, we should probably be thinking about adding more seats in order to make sure that these very difficult, challenging decisions are made less so. You know, I don't presume to do your job for you, but that seems like something that I'd approach them on.

I assume that hon. member is going to be voting, then, because we're taking his advice in the Chamber.

Justice Miller said at that point, "Maybe we should have had more than 89 ridings to play with." January 12 again, *Hansard*, page 469.

Justice Miller would go on to say, "You'll be pleased to know that we had a government minister present this afternoon and we kind of chided him a little bit about [the fact that] we only have 89," and we need more. Justice Miller would go on to say, "If you are concerned that we don't have enough electoral divisions – sorry – we can't do anything about that. We're limited to 89." Again, continually making clear that they felt a challenge with that situation.

Reinforced again on January 20 by Greg Clark, the NDP appointee to the commission: "There are many things that we wish we had control over, that being one of them, perhaps having more than 89 seats to work with."

January 21 the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, who we just heard about again, that I started my comments with, says, "There's no doubt that [the] electoral map requires more seats. As members of the Official Opposition myself and my colleagues raised concerns" about there not being enough seats.

Then, lastly, this is from Justice Miller.

We as a commission have very few tools available to us in terms of what we can do to allocate boundaries. One is outside of our control, and that is the number of seats that we can use. We were just directed that we have two more seats, so we're limited to 89.

We have to work with the legislated mandate of [only] two . . . seats

but we could use more, again, what this Chamber is being asked to do.

Then, lastly, Greg Clark to me, when I was testifying on January 20 to the committee and just after I left, says, "That's actually why I asked" – he says to me; I won't name myself, Madam Speaker – "about the number of seats, because that would potentially help." "You don't get a say on that, do you?" the person who's presenting to them says. Clark goes on to say, "We don't. We can nudge and [we can] ask nicely, but, no. We don't get any control." The presenter then goes on to say, "Can you write back that you're hearing a lot that the public wants more seats?" Mr. Chair says, "That's exactly what we [are going to] recommend." That is the last day of hearings.

So for the Official Opposition to stand up in this Chamber and somehow indicate that their members that were on the commission did not recommend seats is categorically false. To say that Justice Miller did not recommend it is also categorically false. In fact, he went out of his way to explain the challenges that we are seeing because of population, which would lead to the recommendation that is before this Chamber.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Madam Speaker, most shockingly, the Official Opposition over and over – there are many more quotes on that – went to the commission and asked for more seats. But now, shockingly, when the government is here trying to accommodate what the commission said to be able to make sure that all Albertans – rural, urban, north, south, east, west – can have the best representation, they somehow want to reject Albertans receiving more seats despite the fact that the population has grown. The fact is that they are absolutely against the majority, as I just showed you here. They are speaking on something that is not being recommended by the majority.

4:00

Instead, what the majority said was that we need to get more seats to be able to make sure we can get the best map possible for the people of Alberta. The hon. members asked them to do so when they submitted to them. Hopefully, they will now take the time to recognize that and vote the right way on behalf of all the people of Alberta, but at the very least stop saying to this Chamber that their commissioners never asked for more seats when they did, that their MLAs never asked for more seats when they did, and instead stand up for all Albertans across this province and get the best map that we can, Madam Speaker.

**Ms Hoffman:** Madam Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. I do want to commend the staff who researched and pulled

together a number of cherry-picked quotes. That is very good searching of *Hansard*. I certainly commend that.

I also want to say to all members of this Assembly a reminder of what we're actually debating here. The government brought forward a bill that assigned the number of seats. The government chose to implement that bill. The government is doing something unprecedented in Canadian history, especially in any civilized democracy, where they set up an independent process – that's what we had – with terms defined by the government. It was a government bill. They set up an independent process. They appointed the majority of the members to that process. The first draft of the recommendations came back, and what's happened – reviewing past precedent, there was one time where seats were added, but they were added between the first report and the second report. Never in the history of any democracy in Canada has a government taken the final report, thrown it in the garbage, and created a new process, changing the number of seats.

Madam Speaker, if the government wanted to pretend that they were actually doing anything democratic in this process, they would have looked at what happened under the Stelmach government, which is that when the first report came back and a bunch of people got scared about what was going to happen to the seat count in rural Alberta because the growth then, even more so now, is the lion's share in the urban centres within our province, they gave the commission, the independent commission created by the government and the opposition members nominating people, an opportunity between their first report and their second report to add more seats. That was already skirting the line, but at least that was enabling an independent process with the independent commissioners who had heard the commission presentations to review the data and come forward with a map that had more seats.

The current government under the UCP chose not to do that. Why did they choose not to do that? Because they thought they had the committee. They thought they could get the report that they wanted, but it appears that the chair of the committee stuck with the judiciary principles outlined in the legislation passed by the government to bring forward a map that would enable communities of like interest, communities of similar population balances, to have a map that would enable something that looked fair for an electoral outcome. The government didn't like that. The UCP has decided that, instead, they want to do something completely unprecedented, and they want to change the rules after the final recommendation. They say that it's for rural Alberta. That's what they say.

Let me tell you. As the Premier pointed out very recently, I am very proud to have grown up in rural Alberta. I misspoke the other day when the Leader of the Official Opposition asked me how many people live in my hometown. I said about 300. That's how many lived there when I left. There are fewer than 200 people who live in my hometown now, fewer than 90 habitated houses or dwellings that are currently populated. I love knocking in my hometown and in other communities like it. You can door-knock pretty quickly, but also I love it because afterwards I swing by what we used to call the One Stop, but now I think it's B Hunt Express. It's the post office, the ice cream store, concession, bank. That's where everyone hangs out. You go to the post office when you pick up your kids from school or when you're coming into town to get groceries. It's a great place to gather, to get information, and to connect with one another. I love rural Alberta and I love democracy.

The government members have said: well, there are 800,000 more people living in Alberta now than there were when the maps were drawn last time. That is true. There were also 800,000 more people living in Alberta at the time the government brought forward their legislation saying 89 seats. They knew this, so to say now, after they get maps that they don't like, maps that they weren't able

to gerrymander through the commission, maps that are absolutely done through an independent process, and maps that there is only one report – one report – that the majority signed on – and comments that were made in committee hearings or even debate that happened in this Legislature is not the recommendation of the committee.

The absolute independent commission recommended a set of maps. They recommended that they be implemented. That's what the government doesn't want to do. That's why the government is coming to this place with something completely unprecedented, wanting to blow up the whole system that they themselves created.

There have been a few times where I've reminded private members of this Assembly that what the government is trying to do is put their thumb on private members. They're trying to dictate what each and every one of us can do as independent members in our own communities, and that is wrong.

I want to go back to that 800,000 population growth piece and acknowledge that Edmonton's population has grown by 18 per cent since the maps were drawn last time, and the seat count has gone up by one. Add two seats, take away one: that's a one-seat increase, which is a 5 per cent increase to the number of seats in Edmonton. The government wants to use the fact that the population of Alberta has increased substantially, including the fact that Edmonton's population has grown by 18 per cent, to argue for why they need to increase the seat count in Alberta, but they don't want to put those seats where the population has actually gone.

I will say that one of the things I learned growing up in a small town with great public education that inspired critical thinking is: why would the government want to do that? Our leader, the Leader of the Official Opposition, has already so eloquently said: because the UCP takes rural Alberta for granted. The UCP thinks that you're – this is one thing that they think – born that way. They think you're born a conservative, and I will say that I completely disagree with their assumption of what is going to happen in the next election. If they want to continue to act with the arrogance and entitlement that past Premiers acted with, that took down governments, they are demonstrating that that is absolutely their playbook today.

What they did is that they made a set of rules. They got their first round of reports; they didn't like it. They could have followed Ed Stelmach's lead and changed the number of seats at that point. They chose not to do that. They continued on with the process. They sent a bunch of MLAs, MLAs' moms and dads, members of the community, and a number of independent citizens to come and present. And we did; we presented en masse.

We have given, as collective Albertans, including members of this Assembly, thousands of hours, and the commission spent thousands of hours reviewing the written submissions, listening to the hearings in person, honouring the democratic process, and they put forward a set of maps that meets the intention of the legislation that the UCP wrote. And the UCP doesn't like it, so they want to take their ball, they want to go home, they want to say, "Nobody is allowed to play. No democracy for you. We're going to change things. We're going to create our own system where we're going to have our own rules, and we're going to make sure that we have a dominated committee of MLAs" because, while they may not have been able to control an independent justice in the province of Alberta, they are confident that they control MLAs in their own caucus.

We know what happens when they don't. They get kicked out. They come sit over on this side.

**Mr. Williams:** Voted against the budget.

**Ms Hoffman:** Yeah. You can't even have an opinion on whether or not the budget hurts rural Alberta or not. A member stood in this place and said that he opposed the budget because no money was being allocated to support his riding because he didn't have a . . . [interjection] It is embarrassing for the UCP that they failed to consult, Madam Speaker, with their own members on the creation of the budget. They failed to support rural Alberta in their budget. A member of their own caucus who said he was not willing to support that budget because it hurt rural Alberta got kicked out of their caucus, sits on this side of the House, and what does the government do? They say, "Oh, we need more MLAs to stand up for rural Alberta," when what they did is kick out an MLA who stood up for rural Alberta.

Oh, he sure did vote against the budget. He sure did vote against the budget. And guess what, Speaker? I think this is one of the litmus tests for the level of arrogance and entitlement. The fact that we have the Minister of Municipal Affairs sitting over there cackling in his chair about how inappropriate it is to vote against the budget is not . . .

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

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

#### **Point of Order Referring to the Presence of a Member**

**Mr. Schow:** I think it'd be wildly inappropriate to point out the presence or absence of a member in this Chamber, and being a learned, experienced member, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora would know that. Madam Speaker, I think that this is, in fact, a point of order, pointing out that someone is here. Now, if we want to play the game of who is and who is not here, I'm happy to play that game, but I don't think that's the road we want to go down.

**Ms Gray:** Madam Speaker, I am not sure what the Government House Leader is talking about. When we are speaking or when they're speaking and we're getting heckled or people are interacting with us, we often say the riding name and talk about that. This is normal in this House. No absence was referred to, and if the minister was laughing and my member put that on the record, that is a consequence of being in this Chamber and not a point of order. I look forward to your ruling.

**4:10**

**The Deputy Speaker:** I, too, may have been confused at why a point of order was being called in that moment. Perhaps the Government House Leader achieved a break for this Assembly, but that's about it. It's not a point of order.

The hon. member may continue.

#### **Debate Continued**

**Ms Hoffman:** It's clear that I've hit a nerve, and I hope I've given the opportunity for everyone to consider what we're doing right now in this place and that they vote against this government motion, which is ham fisted and wrong headed.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Mr. Yao:** Madam Speaker, I ask that we move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

### Time Allocation on Government Motion 37

39. Mr. Schow moved:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Government Motion 37 is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to the further consideration of the motion, and upon the expiry of the time allotted every question necessary for the disposal of the motion shall be put forthwith.

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to move Government Motion 39 from myself. Now, the reason for this motion is that we do have a time crunch coming with the end of session and I want to make sure we get to the point, which is debating this motion, voting this motion, and also getting to more robust debate about the validity and the importance of moving to 91 seats.

Madam Speaker, we have said multiple times in this House that we are following the recommendations of the commission and the chair of the commission, who suggested that it'd be better if we had 91 seats, but don't just take it from me. Don't just take it from me. Take it from the members opposite who testified before the committee. For one example, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud said on January 21, on page 846 of *Hansard*:

I believe strongly that there could have been many more seats . . .

Many more seats.

. . . added to the electoral map that would have more fairly provided that distribution of population, which would have allowed for some rural ridings to not be changed or to be eliminated, but unfortunately the government made a choice of only two, which puts the very large cities competing with each other for a limited extra seat.

Madam Speaker, don't take it from me. Take it from the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Now, further, the same member said, in testifying before the committee:

I think, as I said, as an MLA my colleagues and I spoke very clearly about the fact that two additional ridings given the significant population increase we've seen in this province was simply . . . inadequate.

Madam Speaker, don't take it from me. Take it from the member opposite for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Further to that member's comments, January 21, same page of *Hansard*:

There is no doubt that Alberta's electoral map requires more seats. As members of the Official Opposition myself and my colleagues raised concerns and voted against the government's Bill 31, which only allocated two new seats to the electoral map, on the basis that Alberta's population growth warranted much more than that.

Madam Speaker, don't take it from me. Take it from the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

There is an exhaustive list of examples of members opposite testifying before the committee. Now, Madam Speaker, I would never advocate for eating paper, but we keep receipts. How do they taste?

With that, I move Government Motion 39.

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

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to this closure motion on Government Motion 37. I'll briefly respond to the Government House Leader. It's a very simple thing. The fact that individuals agree on a particular set of ends does not mean that they agree on any possible means to get there. The fact that we recognize the significant growth

of population in Alberta requires more representation does not mean we agree with government MLAs drawing the maps, a highly undemocratic process, but that's of course been what we always see from this government. This is a government that tramples on the rule of law, has no respect for democracy, and continually puts its own interests ahead of those of Albertans. That's what we have here right now again, this government shutting down and shutting out the voices of Albertans and their representatives, including many Albertans.

Because this government does not want to hear from Albertans, I'm going to take some time to share some of the words of Albertans on precisely this now. From Susan Samson, the former mayor of Sylvan Lake, member of the Electoral Boundaries Commission, quote: "When MLAs of any stripe start picking their voters instead of the voters picking their MLAs, we're on a very slippery slope. I am totally demoralized and dismayed that our work was discounted and not accepted. This is a real stab in the heart for democracy, grassroots democracy being challenged."

Stephanie Drysdale, citizen of Medicine Hat:

I have serious concerns with [the Premier's] decision to reject the recommendations of Alberta's independent Electoral Boundaries Commission and redraw riding maps. This is a direct conflict of interest.

A governing party should never have the power to draw the boundaries that determine its own electoral fate. That is exactly why independent commissions exist – to protect the integrity of our democratic process,

the means, Madam Speaker.

This sets a dangerous precedent. If a government can override an independent commission to entrench its own power, Albertans cannot trust that elections [will] reflect the will of the people.

Mr. Greg Clark, who the members enjoyed misquoting a number of times today and misrepresenting the words that Mr. Clark spoke, Madam Speaker. The fact is that what Mr. Clark said: "I was surprised and disappointed to learn that a committee of MLAs has instead been tasked with creating a new map . . . In Canada, we don't want elected officials drawing their own election maps." He was very clear in a post to social media that he does not believe the government can simply take the maps they drew and add two new seats. This government is picking and choosing their quotes to misrepresent what people have said, including the members of the boundary commission.

Mr. Brad Tomlinson, a citizen from Calgary:

The UCP has broken with an accepted process regarding the redrawing of electoral boundaries . . . there can only be one reason: gerrymandering . . .

The new committee for electoral boundaries proposed by the UCP is an authoritarian abuse of the system. It is a blatant attempt to manipulate electoral boundaries in favour of the UCP.

Dr. Jared Wesley, a respected political scientist at the University of Alberta, in an article in the *National Observer*:

If the government were looking to design a process,

the means, Madam Speaker,

that would allow them to gerrymander districts, this is one approach . . .

This particular decision fits with a worrying pattern of changing the rules of the game when [the Premier] doesn't like the outcome . . .

[it] puts the decisions in the hands of partisan appointees in a way that we have not seen in Canada, really since the 1940s or earlier.

Mr. Greg Wandzilak, a citizen of Edmonton:

It is deeply troubling to see Alberta move toward altering electoral boundaries while disregarding the recommendations of its own independent commission . . . when a government overrides this process simply because it dislikes the outcome, it

undermines public trust and raises serious concerns about the integrity of our democracy. Gerrymandering has no place in a system that claims to value fair representation.

Jeromy Farkas, mayor of Calgary: there's no noncynical take on what the government is doing.

Andrew Knack, mayor of Edmonton: at the end of the day, elected representatives should never be the ones setting their own boundaries.

Lastly, Madam Speaker, the government's favourite political scientist, Mr. Duane Bratt: since becoming Premier, Danielle Smith has systematically attempted to weaken any . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. member.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Oh, pardon me. I withdraw, Madam Speaker.

Since becoming premier, [the Premier] has systematically attempted to weaken any political counterweights . . .

[This committee] is not an arm's-length process whose purpose is to find the best, balanced, and fair boundaries, but likely a deliberate attempt to manipulate ridings to the benefit of the UCP.

It's undemocratic. It's unacceptable, Madam Speaker. The ends don't justify undemocratic . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there others to speak to the motion? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

**Member Kayande:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. This is now the 13th time allocation motion that we have seen in just this legislative session. The UCP has introduced 84 time allocation motions since 2019. Since 1937 there have been 150 instances of closure. That means 54 per cent of the time allocation motions in Alberta history have occurred over seven years of UCP government. At this rate, this is seven times the time allocation rate as compared to Alberta's historical average. It's quite a record. And what has time allocation been used for by this government? To take the constitutional rights of teachers away, to take away public health care, to raise Calgaryans' property taxes, all bad things that are very unpopular with Albertans.

4:20

But closure has not yet been used to take away Albertans' right to vote in free and fair elections until now. Here's the thing. If the government were intending this GM 37 committee to be fair, they would simply reappoint the boundaries commission. They don't want to debate this. This government doesn't want to talk about it, so they're closing debate. Free and fair elections are the most fundamental freedom we have. Even today most of the world does not live in democracies with free and fair elections. We are fortunate to have this right, and it was fought for and won in blood.

Let me make it clear. Instead of extending the work of the Electoral Boundaries Commission, instead of reappointing the existing commissioners, this government is going to build its own maps, and they won't even let us talk about extending and reappointing the existing commission as a proposed solution. The commissioners have spent the last year travelling across this province talking to Albertans, learning from commission and staff expertise. It's clear that this UCP government is unwilling to trust the commissioners to continue on with this process. Why is that?

The Electoral Boundaries Commission had unanimous agreement – unanimous agreement – on the interim map. There was a majority agreement of the final map, which was very similar. Let there be no ambiguity here. There was a majority report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. The majority report is the report of the commission. It is itself the product of compromise.

The UCP government didn't like it. They didn't like the majority report because the majority report is fair, and the UCP government knows that they will have a tougher time winning on a fair map. After increasing class sizes, wrecking everyone's health care, increasing taxes, and running deficits, it's an amazing suite of failures never before experienced by any Alberta government. How? How could a government be so bad and still yet expect to win elections? They won't even relieve the gas tax. Who ever heard of a conservative government that doesn't cut taxes?

Why can this government be so bad? Because they don't expect to have to defend their record. They're so allergic to defending their record that they won't even give this Chamber a chance to debate any options to their partisan, broken, illegitimate, possibly illegal GM 37 motion. It's all woven from the same cloth.

This partisan GM 37 committee is illegitimate. Only the properly appointed legislative Electoral Boundaries Commission is legitimate. Only their majority report, the entire majority report, is legitimate. If the UCP wants to put its fingers on the scales one more time, then only a reconstituted commission should be considered. But note that this is not a way out or a compromise. The commission report itself is the product of compromise. It simply makes the government signal of what they intend to do. Not reappointing that commission makes the government signal of what they intend to do all the more obvious.

I myself spoke in front of the Electoral Boundaries Commission, and I remember interacting with the commission chair on hybrid ridings. I don't like them. The commission chair said very clearly: you know, you're treating this like it's a skunk at a picnic. My response was: look, we just want to get to a fair outcome, and I think that the most fair outcome is making sure that Calgary voters are treated as Calgary voters. The commission report was a compromise that included my view, other Albertans' views, thousands of views, which the commission was empowered to do.

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

**Ms Sweet:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today we're not simply debating a motion. We're confronting a decision by this government to use time allocation to shut down debate on the Electoral Boundaries Commission referral, a decision that goes to the heart of our democratic representation in Alberta.

Let's be clear. Time allocation is not neutral. It's not an administrative convenience. It is a deliberate choice to limit scrutiny, restrict voices, and curtail the ability of MLAs to speak on behalf of the people who sent us here. When that choice is applied to something as foundational as electoral boundaries, it raises questions about this government's commitment to transparency and to democracy.

The Electoral Boundaries Commission exists to ensure that all representation remains fair as Alberta grows and changes. It is one of the few processes where Albertans can directly influence how their communities are represented in this Chamber. They attended the hearings. They submitted written feedback. They spoke passionately about rural representation, about fast-growing suburban ridings, about keeping communities of interest intact.

Albertans participated because they believed their voices mattered, but when concerns were raised in this Assembly about the government's approach to the referral – concerns about timing, about transparency, about the need for full debate – the government's response was, again, not to listen. They refused to engage. It was not to defend its position. Instead, it imposed time allocation, and they shut the conversation down. That's not how a government behaves when it's confident in its decisions. That is how a government behaves when it's uncomfortable with scrutiny.

This is not an isolated incident. It's part of a broader pattern that Albertans have been raising for years, a pattern of consultation that feels predetermined, a pattern of decisions made before public input is gathered, and a pattern of dismissing concerns when they don't align with the government's agenda.

Let me expand on that pattern. Municipal leaders across the province have repeatedly raised concerns about major policy changes affecting local governance, funding, and planning. When people responsible for delivering front-line services – water, roads, emergency response, recreational planning – say that they feel unheard, that should matter, but too often those concerns are set aside. When educators came forward, when teachers, school boards, and parents submitted extensive feedback on curriculum changes, raised concerns about age appropriateness, sequencing, and lack of classroom testing material, again, the government refused to listen. When people who spend every day in classrooms say that they're not being listened to, that should matter.

Consider the health care sector, health care workers, professional associations, and rural communities all raising concerns about system restructuring, staffing shortages, and the impact of centralization on local decision-making. Many reported that their warnings were not reflected in any of those final decisions. Some community leaders said they felt that the government had already made up their mind before the consultation even began. When the people responsible for keeping Albertans healthy say they're not being heard, that should matter.

These examples are not ideology; they are about process. They are about whether Albertans can trust that their voices are being taken seriously. They are about whether this government sees consultation as a genuine dialogue or a box to be checked off on the way to the predetermined outcome.

That is why today's use of time allocation is so concerning. It fits the government's pattern. When the government is uncomfortable with the debate, it limits it. When a government raises concerns, they acknowledge, but they don't address it. When transparency is needed most, the government chooses expediency instead.

We've been clear. Our role is to ensure that Albertans' voices are heard in this Chamber, and we take that responsibility seriously. It is especially important when we are debating something as fundamental as electoral boundaries, the very structure of representation in this province. Time allocation on a boundary commission referral sends a very clear message. It tells Albertans that their input is secondary. It tells them that the decisions can be made first and justified later. It tells them that when the government is uncomfortable with that scrutiny, they'll simply just shut it down.

Albertans deserve better than that. They deserve a government that listens before it acts. They deserve a government that respects the institutions that protect fair representation. They deserve a Legislature where debate is not treated as a barrier but as a foundation of our democracy.

Madam Speaker, the question before us today is not simply whether debate should continue. The question is whether the government believes Albertans deserve to have their voices reflected in this Chamber, whether the government believes that the democratic process should be transparent and accountable, whether we believe that the decisions about representation should be made in openness, not behind closed doors. The opposition will continue to stand up for Albertans.

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

**Member Miyashiro:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, as my colleagues have said already, time allocation is largely undemocratic. Cutting off debate, not allowing our opposition to

fully voice our concerns, I guess, is just par for the course for an undemocratic government.

4:30

Hey, let's look at something first. Let's talk about these 91 seats that the members opposite keep throwing out. They keep saying: well, this person said we need 91, and this person said we need 91, and this person said we need 91. Ninety-one is, like, the new six seven for them.

You know, quite simply, all the population growth had occurred by the time the boundaries commission was formed, so why did this government only allow for two extra seats and not four? Why is that? Why did they just not put that in the terms of reference? Why did they not allow the boundaries commission to say, "Hey, draw up a map that you think best reflects the population in this province"? They never gave them that leeway. They never gave them that freedom to do that. You know why? Because they want to control this process. Obviously, all the growth happened in Calgary and Edmonton, and why wouldn't you want to give Calgary and Edmonton more seats? Well, because there's a chance that those seats might actually not be won by the UCP.

You know, the other thing, when you look at this and the things that they don't want us to talk about, Madam Speaker, is that in the final report UCP members would have to compete with each other for seats. In southern Alberta we see that there would be two ridings melded into one that two existing UCP members would have to compete for. We see that in central Alberta in a couple of different instances. But you know what? That's what you do to ensure fair representation.

On our side we also lose seats. Did you ever consider that on that side? We lose seats as well, but you didn't hear us gnashing our teeth and clutching our pearls and crying to the wind about: oh, no, we need a whole new process because we lost seats. We understand how this works. The last time the boundaries were redrawn – and this is really important for members opposite to understand – we lost two seats of cabinet ministers and the Speaker. Did we complain and change the process? No. You can shake your head. You don't think it's true? It's totally true.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. member, please direct your comments through the chair.

**Member Miyashiro:** I'm sorry, Madam Speaker. I was distracted by that bobble-head thing going on over there.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Not helpful, hon. member.

**Member Miyashiro:** I'm sorry. I withdraw.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Thank you.

**Member Miyashiro:** I'm sorry. Where was I now? See, I was totally distracted.

We implemented the recommendations in that report because that was the right thing to do. That was the process that was laid out. The boundaries commission does a report. The government says: hey, thanks for your work; we're going to implement your recommendations.

You know what's interesting, too, when we go back and look at this and you look at how they want to gerrymander my area in southern Alberta? Well, at the public hearings for the boundaries commission the reeve of the MD of Taber said: "We don't want to be a part of Lethbridge. We don't want to wake up and have our representative from Lethbridge." The acting reeve of Cardston county said the same thing. He got up and said: "We don't want our

representative to be from Lethbridge. We have more in common with, obviously, Cardston, Magrath, Stirling, Raymond.” In fact, the reeve of the MD of Taber also said that if you’re going to change the boundaries in southern Alberta, it would make more sense to have Taber lumped in with Vauxhall and Brooks, just so you know, Madam Speaker.

The problem that I see and that most of us see with this is that there was a process. There were thousands of people that gave submissions and spoke to the commission. That was the Albertans speaking. Those are people that came out and said: hey, this is what we think would be best for the province of Alberta; this would be best for our areas. There is no person that I’ve talked to on Lethbridge city council that thinks it would be a good idea and a way better way to govern a city and work with four different MLAs in a city of our size than just two. There’s nobody that I’ve spoken with in Red Deer that thinks that splitting Red Deer into four is a good idea. Oh, and by the way, the one map we saw splitting Blackfalds into two to make their map fit: how much sense does that make? That’s how crazy this is, that we’re going to split things just on our whim.

All right, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, what an honour it is to stand in this House. It always is, but I sure do hate that I have to be here to speak to closure once again. In fact, it’s feeling like a bit of déjà vu over here given that I spoke to closure in the fall, first when it came to Bill 2. That was when the UCP took the unprecedented step of invoking the notwithstanding clause against teachers. It very much alarmed me to do it then, and then it alarmed me even more to have to do it on Bill 9 when the UCP used the notwithstanding clause again, in fact three more times, again, an unprecedented use in Canadian history, against their suite of antitrans bills. Here we are in April of 2026, and once again this UCP government is invoking closure on a very important motion. This is now a UCP government that has invoked closure more than any other government in history.

**Member Ceci:** Shame.

**Member Irwin:** That is shameful.

It’s shameful because I reflect on how the Government House Leader just yesterday mentioned something along the lines – I almost said that I don’t have the benefit of the Blues, but I do listen. He mentioned something along the lines of: “Don’t worry. Members had an opportunity to participate in the boundaries commission.” And he said: and members are also going to have an opportunity to debate it. Well, how many of our members are going to have an opportunity to debate it? Very few. That’s a shame because all 87 of us – 87 – were elected here to speak on behalf of our constituents.

I know I can speak for myself and for many members on this side of the House that although this is a bit more complicated and it requires a little bit more explaining to the general public, we have gotten a lot of correspondence on this issue. Our constituents care. I hear the Member for Banff-Kananaskis. She’s heard a lot on this issue because hers is a riding that is going to be impacted by this.

I want to quote the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, who just earlier mentioned the fact that she loves rural Alberta. Yeah, I, too, love rural Alberta, and I actually – I don’t know if I’ve ever said this in the Chamber – really appreciated the Premier just the other day pointing out just how many of us on this side of the Chamber have our roots in rural Alberta. Thank you, Premier, because no

matter where we’re from on this side of the House, we are going to fight for rural Alberta. We’re going to fight for urban Alberta. We are going to fight for all Albertans so that they are fairly represented in this Legislature.

It’s hard to do so when our chance to debate is cut off, so I would urge those members opposite to really think about that. When you are elected to this Chamber, you are here to be a voice for your constituents whether they agree with you or not.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. member, direct your comments through the chair.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I’m a little bit heated on this, as you can see.

Again, I’ve been listening closely to the debate from others in this Chamber. You know, I’m also shocked by the fact that this UCP government is unwilling to look at a fuel tax, look at a gas tax. Don’t worry, Madam Speaker. This connects to the very motion at hand on electoral boundaries. The Finance minister stood today, as he has multiple times, and said that he can’t offer Albertans a break on the gas tax because his government is running a massive deficit. Hmm. Yet this same government stands before us saying that it’s going to be adding more MLAs than it had planned at a cost to Albertans: the MLAs’ cost, the offices, the MLAs’ staff. So do Albertans want more MLAs at an added cost so the UCP can again redraw maps, or do they want gas tax relief?

Again, you know, we have heard from constituents on this issue, but we’ve also heard from a whole lot of constituents who are struggling with affordability. I use that example to say that the hypocrisy is astounding for members on that side of the House. Instead of working on the cost of living, instead of addressing the issues that really matter, this government’s priority is rigging the next election so that they cannot lose. I can tell you that this is a UCP government that continues to not listen to constituents, continues to not listen to the needs of all Albertans.

My colleagues and I on this side of the House spend a lot of time in rural ridings to make sure that their voices are heard. In fact, the Member for Edmonton-West Henday and I were just in West Yellowhead, spent time in multiple communities in that riding. It was really lovely to be there, but I can tell you that some of them definitely had concerns about how adequately their voices were being heard in the Legislature. So our commitment, the entire Alberta NDP caucus’s commitment, to anyone watching, wherever you live in Alberta, is that we are going to fight for you.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 39 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:40 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	LaGrange	Schow
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Loewen	Schulz
Boitchenko	Long	Sigurdson, R.J.
Bouchard	Lovely	Sinclair
Cyr	Lunty	Singh
Dreeshen	McDougall	Smith
Dyck	Nally	Stephan
Ellis	Neudorf	Turton
Fir	Nicolaides	van Dijken
Getson	Nixon	Wiebe
Glubish	Petrovic	Williams

Horner	Pitt	Wilson
Hunter	Rowswell	Wright, J.
Jean	Sawhney	Yao
Johnson	Sawyer	Yaseen
Jones		

4:50

Against the motion:

Al-Guneid	Elmeligi	Metz
Arcand-Paul	Eremenko	Miyashiro
Batten	Ganley	Nenshi
Boparai	Goehring	Pancholi
Brar, Gurinder	Gray	Renaud
Brar, Gurtej	Haji	Sabir
Ceci	Hayter	Schmidt
Chapman	Hoffman	Shepherd
Dach	Ip	Sweet
Deol	Irwin	Tejada
Eggen	Kasawski	Wright, P.
Ellingson	Kayande	
Totals:	For – 46	Against – 35

[Government Motion 39 carried]

### Select Special Committee on Electoral Boundaries

(continued)

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

**Mr. Yao:** Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak in support of Government Motion 37. This motion is about fairness. It is about representation. It is about making sure Alberta's electoral map reflects the reality of our province today, not what it looked like years ago, because Alberta is growing and we're seeing real population shifts right across the entire province. Some communities are expanding quickly. Others are covering vast geographic areas with smaller populations spread far apart. That creates pressure on our current system, and when that pressure builds, it is our responsibility as elected members to step in and make sure the system still works for the people we represent, and that's exactly what this motion does.

Now, I want to start by acknowledging the work of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. They spent months reviewing data, and they heard from Albertans. They brought forward a report. That work matters, but it is not the final word. Our role as legislators is to review that work and decide whether it truly meets the needs of Albertans. In this case we believe it does not go far enough. That is why we are taking action.

Government Motion 37 gives us the opportunity to correct course and ensure that representation in this province is fair and balanced. One of the most important parts of this motion is a proposal to increase the number of electoral divisions from 87 to 91. This is just a practical response to a growing province. More people means more demand for representation. It means more calls, more meetings, more community engagement, and more responsibility on each MLA, and adding seats helps to manage that. It allows MLAs to better serve their constituents, improves access, and ensures that communities are not stretched too thin across large and difficult-to-manage ridings.

This is especially important when we talk about rural Alberta. Mr. Speaker, rural ridings are definitely not like urban ridings. They're larger. There's much more distance, and there are many different communities, each one so unique with its own priorities, and each with its own challenges.

As MLAs we know what that looks like. We know what it means to drive hours between meetings. We know what it means to try and be present in multiple communities at once. Mr. Speaker, for me to reach a couple of the communities in my region, I literally have to take an airplane. That's the only way I can access them. If I'm lucky in the winter and that road is frozen, I can drive on that. If I'm really fortunate in the summer, I might be able to take a boat, but that can be pretty precarious as well. It's interesting just seeing the diversity of the ridings that we have here.

These things aren't theoretical. This is the reality on the ground. When we're talking about adding seats, we're talking about giving these communities a stronger voice, and we are saying that geography matters. We're saying that access matters, and we're saying that rural Albertans deserve representation that works for them.

At the same time, we're not ignoring growth in other parts of the province. This motion allows us to take a balanced approach, ensures that growing areas are properly reflected while also addressing the unique challenges faced by rural communities. I believe that balance is critical.

Now, there has been some criticism of the motion. Some have raised concerns about the creation of a new select special committee. They've suggested it gives the government too much control of the process, but if we step back a little bit: who sits in this Assembly? It's elected representatives, and these people were chosen by Albertans to make decisions on their behalf, and creating a committee to study this is made up of representatives. This is part of the accountability process. It means the process still continues to happen in an open debate. It means that members can ask questions, debate proposals, and ensure that decisions are made carefully because that's how democracy works. We're not elected to step aside; we're elected to lead.

Some have suggested that this process could become politicized. It's not about political advantage. This is about making sure the map reflects the people of Alberta as they are today. Motion 37 is about ensuring that representation is fair, workable, and responsive. We're not drawing lines behind closed doors. We're creating a process that allows elected members to review questions and improve the outcome.

You know, I'm very much inspired by my good friend from Edmonton-Whitemud's example. Even she supports multiple ridings. If we were to look at January 21, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud said:

There is no doubt that Alberta's electoral map requires more seats. As members of the Official Opposition myself and my colleagues raised concerns and voted against the government's Bill 31, which only allocated two new seats to the electoral map, on the basis that Alberta's population growth warranted much more than that.

Oh, here's another one, again from January 21, again Edmonton-Whitemud. Her advocacy has been great in this regard, and here she's quoted as saying:

I believe strongly that there could have been many more seats added to the electoral map that would have more fairly provided that distribution of population, which would have allowed for some rural ridings to not be changed or to be eliminated, but unfortunately the government made a choice of only two, which puts the very large cities competing with each other for a limited extra seat.

My goodness. I could go on and on and on. So many, so many, but what I'm trying to get at here is that even the members across the way in His Majesty's Official Opposition, whether they realize it or not, actually support the changes that this government is making because they're responsible. All right? We were not elected

to step aside; we were elected to lead. This is a responsible government and responsible governance.

Another point that has been raised is the issue of public hearings, and some have said that removing mandatory hearings reduces transparency, but that's not what this motion does. It does allow for flexibility, allows for the process to move forward efficiently while still providing opportunities for input. What we're avoiding is unnecessary delay because timing does matter.

Mr. Speaker, we're working towards the 2027 general election. Elections Alberta needs certainty, and they need time to prepare. That includes everything from voter lists to polling stations to ensuring Albertans know where and how to vote. If we delay this process or leave it uncertain, we create confusion, and confusion in an election is not something we should accept. This motion will give us a clear path forward to make the necessary adjustments now so that the system has enough time to adapt accordingly.

5:00

You know, Mr. Speaker, I do want to come back to a simple point. Representation matters. It matters that people feel heard, it matters that they can access their MLAs, and it matters that the system reflects the realities of where they live. In rural communities we have to respect the fact that there's a huge geography, with many physical barriers there. We're limited by the roads that are available to us. That's why it's so important to maintain numbers in rural areas.

Mr. Speaker, everyone needs to know that this is a decision that we do not take lightly, but it's a decision that we do take seriously. We have an opportunity to improve representation in this province, we have an opportunity to strengthen our democratic system, and we have an opportunity to ensure that Alberta's electoral map works not just today but into the future. I encourage all members of this Assembly to support Government Motion 37.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me get the facts straight. With Government Motion 37 the UCP is throwing out the independent boundaries commission's final report and implementing a completely new and unprecedented process. In short, they are rigging the process. They are gerrymandering the electoral maps through a committee led by and dominated by UCP MLAs to influence the outcome of the next election. They are ignoring the past precedent in this regard. They are ignoring the long-standing traditions of this province and this country when it comes to drawing electoral maps, and they're insulting the commission and thousands of Albertans who participated in this boundary redraw process in good faith.

If the UCP gets their way, Mr. Speaker, Calgary, Lethbridge, Red Deer would simply become unrecognizable. This is the most unprecedented and undemocratic action ever taken by an Alberta government. Politicians should never draw election maps. They should never choose their voters. That's fundamentally wrong. It undermines democracy and the trust Albertans have in their democratic institutions. It is yet another example of democratic backsliding that has been happening since the UCP took office.

Mr. Speaker, erosion of democracy doesn't happen overnight. Here in this province we have seen a pattern of behaviour from this UCP government that undermines our democracy, our democratic institution every day in every possible way. Studies and research that track and aggregate indicators of democratic erosion stress factors such as: the rule of law, electoral processes, free and fair

democratic elections, participation, government functioning, and violation of individual rights and civil liberties.

I want to highlight that the rule of law requires that there be fair democratic elections and there be safeguards when it comes to protecting the role of this Legislature, when it comes to distinguishing the role of three different branches of the government. This Legislature, for its functioning, has the help and support of its independent officers who ensure the democratic functioning of our democratic institutions. This government, in particular the executive, has tried every step of the way to undermine their roles.

Be it the Auditor General's investigations. The government directed its employees: do not answer directly to the Auditor General and go through government-appointed lawyers. That's interference in an independent officer's work. Be it the Information and Privacy Commissioner. The government brought wholesale changes to FOIP, to the information and privacy regime, and they never consulted the Information and Privacy Commissioner, and they got a letter afterward. Be it the Ethics Commissioner. Instead of enabling an independent officer of the Legislature to oversee the code of ethics, conflict of interest laws, they changed the laws and made the Premier's chief of staff in charge of overseeing the Premier's office and other senior staff's ethics disclosures. That's also undermining an independent office of the Legislature. That's not normal behaviour for a democratic government. That's not a normal thing in a functioning democracy, and this is not normal behaviour for any government that believes in the rule of law.

Earlier this week we also learned that the UCP has also sidelined the electoral commissioner's office, another independent officer of this Legislature. Through the news media we learned that the office was caught off-guard by the UCP plan to gerrymander the electoral map and implementation of those maps. They're pushing that into the end of this year, and in no uncertain terms Elections Alberta said that they need at least 18 months to implement the new map. The government knows that, and the government is interfering in the functioning of that independent officer of the Legislature. A government that has some respect for independent officers of the Legislature, that has some interest in free and fair elections will not put the integrity of elections at risk while they take time to rig the process in their favour.

Free and fair elections are fundamental to a functioning democracy. It's important to have those free and fair elections and free and fair transition of power. You cannot have democracy without free and fair elections, Mr. Speaker, but you can have an authoritarian regime with elections as well. If I quote some examples, back in the day where I come from, one army dictator, General Zia-ul-Haq, was there for almost 11 years. He held a referendum on his tenure, and he got 97 per cent of votes in that referendum. Look at the example of Saddam Hussein in the Middle East. He got 99.3 per cent of votes in that election. So it's important that elections are free and fair. Otherwise, nobody believes in the outcome of the election, whether you get 99.7 per cent of the vote.

That's what is at stake. That's what the government is interfering with. I think all of us can agree here that our democracy is only as strong as our free and fair election process is, and all parties and participants should abide by the same set of rules, and they should accept and respect the role of an independent election commission. Now that commission is telling us that they need 18 months at minimum to implement these maps. The government clearly has no intention of listening to that officer of the Legislature.

5:10

We can, I guess, deduce from that that they have no intention of holding a free and fair election. That is dangerous, that is

unprecedented, and all members of this Legislature should be concerned, as so many Albertans are concerned. We have heard from mayors across this province. We have heard from political scientists. We have heard from former Premiers, former members of this Legislature how dangerous that trend is.

I think another thing that the government is doing: every time when they think that an independent officer of the Legislature is not doing what they want them to do, they will withhold the funds and interfere with their administrative autonomy and their function. In Elections Alberta's case last December they gave them \$6.7 million, but the committee – I understand that's the committee's decision, but at the end of the day, all these committees have a UCP majority. Elections Alberta was looking for \$64 million, and the committee only approved \$51 million. Again, if you're deliberately underresourcing these independent officers of the Legislature, you're interfering with their functioning, you're interfering with free and fair elections and democracy in this province, and that will result in Albertans losing trust in democracy, Albertans losing trust in these institutions, Albertans losing interest in elections, and that clearly is another attempt by the UCP to undermine the institution of democracy in this province.

If we talk a little bit about the rule of law, in simple terms it means that the same law applies to everyone. It means that all people, institutions, and governments are subject to the same law, equally enforced and independently adjudicated, free from any political interference whatsoever. The law that the independent commission was dealing with and used to come up with the recommendation and a map was created by the UCP. That was debated in this House, and after debate they said that two new seats should be enough. They did change the criteria, a number of things that used to be mandatory, except for effective representation, section 3. They left all those things at the discretion of the commission.

When the commission did the work, when Justice Miller did the work, now they don't like it. They're looking from a lengthy report, at some comments in passing that if the commission had this which they didn't have, 91 seats, they may have done something different. That comment they have taken so much to heart and ignored everything else that's in the report.

It's also Justice Miller's recommendation that the Legislature should accept the final report with maps in full, and the government is not accepting that report. Rather, they would have their own MLAs redraw the map, choose their own voters, add the seats where they see fit. That's interference in the process. That is unprecedented. That will have implications for rule of law in this province. That will have implications for free and fair elections and Albertans' trust in those elections.

I would ask members of this Legislature to think about it. Think about it at some point. At some point, when you look back at your legacy, you don't want your legacy to be one that you were part of this UCP government's mission to undermine democracy, to erode democracy in this province. I urge all members to vote against the government motion and urge their government to accept the final report of the commission. That's Justice Miller's report.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

**Ms Ganley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are here today talking about gerrymandering, which is just a form of cheating, and if there's one thing that all of us in here know, it is that Albertans don't like cheating. We like things to be fair in this province, so I can understand why the government might feel the need to colourfully represent that which was said in this report. Now, this debate, the debate we're having right now: I think it's important to

clarify what it is and is not about. We are having a debate in this Chamber right now about whether or not politicians should draw boundaries with no public consultation. That is the motion that is before us, and it is the substance of the debate. Should politicians draw the boundaries with no public input? Whether or not we should respect the independent commission who drew maps with public consultation, close to a year of public consultation, I might add.

This is not, Mr. Speaker, a debate about the number of seats. That debate has been settled. It was settled right here in this Chamber. The government used their majority, as they always do, to settle that debate. There has been no material change in the population of this province in the last year. There was a huge change prior to that. But at the moment when this government chose to use its majority to settle the debate in favour of 89 seats, that population growth had already occurred. That was the choice they made.

It is not a choice that we are in a position to reverse at this moment, Mr. Speaker. It is not a choice we are in a position to reverse because we don't have enough time. The elections office, Elections Alberta, needs a year and a half to be able to do the necessary work. That is what they have said. They are in the media saying that publicly, that they need 18 months before the next election. So if we take six more months to settle the debate, there won't be sufficient time. In part, this is the time it always takes. It is also slightly absurd for the government to be like: oh, well, we'll just give them more money; we'll just make them do it faster. Elections Alberta is underresourced, again because the government chose to use its majority to settle the matter. So we find ourselves in this position.

It is important to know what this debate is and isn't about and what this motion is and isn't about. It is about politicians picking the boundaries. It is about establishing a process where there is an MLA committee that is dominated by the UCP so they can once again use their majority to settle the matter, as they always do. As a subbranch of that there might be some sort of something that looks kind of like the commission but has no mandate for public consultation. That's not a very good process.

I think it's important for us to get clear on what we are talking about in here. This is essentially a government that just doesn't like to live with the consequences of its actions, so it's trying to use a side process to change a decision it already made and that it is too late to change. The rest of us out here in the world, Mr. Speaker, all have to live with the consequences of our actions. This government should, too.

5:20

There are a lot of problems with how this debate is being framed and how the report of the commission is being framed. There are a lot of reasons that this choice on behalf of the government, to have MLAs make the decision, is unfair and undemocratic, but I want to focus specifically on what the report recommendations are and are not, because I think my colleagues have covered that extensively. Despite the fact that the recommendations are very clear, there seems to be a lot of misinformation out there, so I think it's worth addressing it.

Section 9 of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act states, "The report of a majority of the members of the Commission is the report of the Commission." Now, there is an added portion that I think it's worth going into. "But if there is no majority, the report of the chair is the report of the Commission." That sentence is what people who do logic or programming like to call a Boolean operator. It has a true or a false value, and in this case "but if there is no majority" makes it false because there is a majority. There is a majority. What that means is that the outcome of the sentence is a

determinate thing, and the outcome is that the report of the majority is the report of the commission. No addendums or waxing philosophical or any other things change that. What the commission recommended was maps. End of story. It's incredibly clear.

Anything the chair adds isn't the report unless there's no majority, and there was a majority. Perhaps members are confused by that very simple and straightforward sentence, but it is absolutely and definitively not the case that the recommendation of the chair, the addendum of the chair, forms part of the report. It's not what the commission recommended. One might say that if one were to say that the commission recommended a move to 91 seats, that would be false in the language of Boolean operators. The report of the majority is the report. It sounds like I'm speaking in tautologies, and this is something that, like, philosophers hate, right? It's like running around saying that a bachelor is an unmarried man. Cool. Everyone knows that. The report of the majority is the report. I'm just going to say it again because there seems to be some confusion.

Now, are there a lot of other words in the report? Sure. There are a lot of other words in the report, and we are left to speculate because we have only the words on the page, right? We do this with judicial decisions as well. The chair seems to be rather desperate to avoid unconstitutionality. It appears that he is deeply worried about that, so he adds in this weird addendum. With all respect to the chair, Mr. Speaker, it is my strong opinion that there is no such thing as splitting the difference between cheating and not cheating. This attempt to say, like, maybe there's a middle road: I don't agree. I don't agree. I don't think there's such a thing as a middle road between cheating or not cheating. I think you are or you are not, and that is all there is to it. I disagree with the addendum of the chair, but it doesn't matter whether I agree or disagree because it doesn't form part of the report or the recommendations. It's just one person's opinion with which I am free to disagree or not agree.

So we are left to wonder why the chair went to such great lengths to potentially offer this peculiar piece of information. It is, if you read the majority's report, because they are terrified. They are terrified for some reason. In fact, the chair himself says in his addendum:

Due to my deep concern regarding the unconstitutionality and administrative law problems of the minority report, I find it necessary to make one further recommendation . . .

And this part I think is critical, Mr. Speaker.

. . . that my fellow Commissioners cannot consent to.

That is him being wildly clear that it is not the report of the majority.

I am reasonably certain that, had we been given 91 electoral divisions, there would be no loss of . . . seats outside of Edmonton and Calgary.

Again, the critical point:

My majority colleagues do not agree with me on this point. That is why I am alone in making this recommendation.

I don't think that the chair is unclear here. I think that he is extremely clear in what he is saying.

It's also worth noting some of the quotes of the majority that sort of support this idea that the majority is terrified of this unconstitutionality. They say:

We are of the view that the minority's proposed maps violate the principle of procedural fairness, unreasonably apply the statutory considerations, and likely violate [section] 3 of the Charter. Each of these concerns is outlined . . . below.

Then they go on to say:

First, the minority's approach violates the principles of procedural fairness, and, relatedly, the values underlying [section] 3 of the Charter.

Section 3 is the right to vote.

The interim report was unanimous. The about-face by the minority did not give the public any notice of what the minority proposes.

What are they talking about here? They are talking about the fact that procedural fairness – it's basically a fancy legal term for fair process, right? Did everyone get a fair shot? What they're saying is that because the minority report doesn't look like anything on the record and because the minority report doesn't look anything like the interim map, the public wasn't given notice, so people didn't have a chance to have their say. That is, in their opinion and in mine, a violation of procedural fairness. They also talk about the fact that this is a clear infringement. What is going on here is that they seem to be really, really, really worried about something unconstitutional happening, and we're left to wonder why.

Mr. Speaker, in here we don't assume intent, and in a court of law it's actually extremely difficult to prove because you are inferring from someone's action. Unless you get active testimony from that person of what they were thinking, you have to make a strong inference from actions. We have a majority who seems to be scared, and they seem to be in a bit of a desperate situation. I think the facts we're left to rely on are the fact that the commission went around the province for months, they talked to a lot of people, and then they issued a report which is, importantly, unanimous. All five members of the commission agree with that report.

Then they do more public consultation on the report, I might add. This is what people are making submissions on when they go before this committee, the report. They come out with a final report, which looks, unsurprisingly, a lot like the interim report because that's what people are commenting on and that's what they're tweaking. That's what a fair process looks like.

Then we get this minority report. The minority report: there are aspects of it that occur absolutely nowhere on the record, and the majority cites it. They say:

To begin [with], their changes to Red Deer, Cochrane, and Chestermere are the product of absolutely no public input or engagement. Moreover, in the cases of Airdrie and St. Albert, there was no public input or engagement for the radically different approach to hybrid electoral boundaries taken by the minority as compared to the interim report.

5:30

What they are saying is that in many instances – Lethbridge is an example; they've given several other examples here – these recommendations appear to have fallen out of the clear blue sky, Mr. Speaker, and that's a bit curious. They're not on the record. No one made a public submission that looks anything like this to the commission, so they've not come from there. They've not come from extensive public consultation. They're not reflected in the interim report, so they've not come from there. It is extremely curious.

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

**Dr. Elmeligi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to speak to Government Motion 37, which won't surprise anybody, but I'm kind of opposed – not even kind of; very strongly opposed – to this motion.

My colleagues have spoken quite a bit about the existing process. We had a debate in the House about how many seats. My colleague from Calgary-Mountain View spoke extensively about how the government used their majority to approve 89 seats and approve the criteria by which the boundaries commission would discuss to create the boundaries report. That commission then spent quite a lot of time consulting with Albertans, thousands of Albertans, over an interim report and then the final report, and then that's the report that has been presented to this House that now apparently isn't good enough or is flawed or doesn't have enough seats or, I don't know, whatever.

My point though, Mr. Speaker, is that there is a process in place for this discussion, and that process has been appreciated and understood by every single member of this House not just who is sitting in this House right now but who has sat in this House previously. That's really important because following that standard process and those standard protocols in the context of boundaries: I think it's really important that it's following that standard process that guarantees the independence of the boundaries commission and guarantees the removal of politics from the designation of riding boundaries. We cannot have politicians choosing their voters and drawing lines on the map. It is not what we are here to do. We are here to work with the boundaries as designed by the boundary commission based on the input from Albertans, and we're here to do the best that we can to be the MLA of those ridings as they are drawn.

What's disturbing to me is that the government, the UCP, does not want to follow these standard processes or practices, and that is what is really in question here. They don't like the results of the majority report for whatever reason, so they want to put their thumb on the scale and influence a different outcome. That's what gerrymandering is. It is politicians putting their thumb on the scale and choosing how riding boundaries should be drawn to increase the chances of some kind of outcome, in this case a UCP majority.

What's disturbing about that for me, Mr. Speaker, is that the idea of free and fair elections and effective representation is really foundational to our democracy. We have a representative democracy. I am standing here representing 55,000 people that live in Banff-Kananaskis. Those 55,000 people can't be here today, fortunately – that would take a really long time – so I'm here as their voice. When my constituents reach out to me to share their concerns, it's my responsibility to reflect those concerns in the House. I tell my constituents all the time that it doesn't matter how they voted. I am their MLA, and it is my responsibility to represent them, so for me this conversation isn't a partisan one because it's not actually about how people vote; it's about making sure that every MLA has a riding boundary that makes sense that they can best represent their people in this place.

This motion represents the most antidemocratic action ever taken by this government, and I'm quite disturbed by it. It also represents the latest example of the government ignoring input from the public and ignoring the results of public consultation. We've seen that with the RCMP, the Canada pensions, dividing health care into four ministries, using the notwithstanding clause four times, the education curriculum, privatizing health care, banning books in libraries, overreaching municipal decision-making on property taxes, water management with interbasin transfers, and so much more. There are many, many examples of this government not listening to the results of public consultation. Every single one of those times, Mr. Speaker, people from the Alberta public volunteered their time and their expertise and their energy to share their input. How insulting is it that that input is just thrown by the wayside as if it didn't matter? But it matters to the people who participated.

This motion around changing the majority report is just the latest example. It ignores the work of the nonpartisan boundaries commission by literally cherry-picking one sentence that seems to justify the whole ridiculousness of the conversation that we're having right now. This motion also wastes \$1.5 million that's already been spent on this endeavour. I don't know about you. We talk a lot about affordability in the House, Mr. Speaker, and how hard it is for Albertans just to put food on the table and pay rent, yet somehow we can waste \$1.5 million on a report that we're not even going to use. Then the Premier talks about: oh, well, she'll just find more money to fund Elections Alberta for what is becoming a very

intense timeline. I think any time we ignore the expertise and input from thousands of Albertans, the very first words out of our mouths should be: "I'm sorry. I'm sorry we wasted your time. Really, all we wanted to do was draw the maps ourselves." Why isn't the government saying that? That's actually the truth.

The Premier told the commission to consider 89 seats based on the results of a debate that we had in this House already, and now she wants to change her mind because she doesn't like the boundaries that the commission created. The Premier and the members opposite say that this is for better rural representation. Okay. Sure. I like to believe that all Albertans, whether they live in urban or rural ridings, are best represented when they are grouped with similar communities. The minority report that has small urban areas with large rural spaces actually risks weakening rural issues and votes.

I'll give you an example from my own personal experience. I now am in the Banff-Kananaskis riding, but it used to be the riding of Banff-Cochrane. That is a large population base in Cochrane surrounded by a large rural landscape, and I lived in one of the smaller communities of Canmore. I can tell you that during that time that we were Banff-Cochrane, the people in the Bow Valley often felt disenfranchised by voting. They felt that their votes didn't matter because we were constantly overshadowed by the population and the issues of Cochrane, which always felt more pressing than what was happening in the Bow Valley. Even when we had an MLA from Canmore in this House, our issues were still overshadowed by Cochrane because they were the bigger population and their issues were perceived to be more important. This is why when we create these ridings, it's about grouping similar communities together, Mr. Speaker, just as much as it's about population.

The UCP wants to pretend that all of rural Alberta is the same and we just need to have more representation for rural Alberta. I disagree. I think we need to have better representation and more effective representation for all Albertans. To sit here and pretend that all of rural Alberta is the same is poppycock. Every community in this province is unique and different and has different opportunities and challenges and things to offer the provincial economy and our provincial culture, so we can't paint rural Alberta with one brush. We need to think about this as communities.

The minority report links Nanton with Banff and Canmore. Has anybody asked the community of Nanton how they feel about that, Mr. Speaker? We did. They don't like it. Okay? Just so you know. Also, Diamond Valley doesn't want to be in with Canmore. When I was presenting to the Electoral Boundaries Commission, they asked me how I felt about Canmore being in with the Crowsnest Pass. My answer to the Electoral Boundaries Commission was simple: it doesn't matter what I think. I will be the best MLA that I can be for my riding whatever the shape and size of my riding. What matters is how the people think, and the people clearly provided abundant input on the interim report. That input was reflected in the final majority report, and that should be the end of this debate. We should just be accepting the final report.

#### 5:40

Riding boundaries in the majority report were drawn based on the input of thousands of Albertans who provided details of their unique communities. The chair, as part of that majority, recommended adoption of the majority report in its totality. Now the UCP wants to pretend that that isn't the actual report, that the addendum is the report or the minority report is the report. I don't know. There's only one majority report, Mr. Speaker. It is the one that was approved by the majority of the commission. To say that they're listening to the chair's recommendations when they're only choosing to listen to one is disingenuous.

Rural Albertans definitely deserve effective representation, just as urban Albertans do, and the boundary commission did that. I listened to the member opposite talk extensively about how his riding is so big and he has to fly to places and it's difficult to connect with all of his constituents, and I sympathize. My riding is also very large. I spend a lot of time in my car. I don't have to fly to any communities to connect with constituents, but I will say that I put a lot of miles on my vehicle, Mr. Speaker, trying to connect with the people across Banff-Kananaskis. I don't think that adding two more rural seats and changing the map is going to help me do my job better, because my job as a rural MLA is to find ways to connect with my people.

Also, we had an opportunity to share all of that with the boundary commission, and if you didn't, oh well. I did. I went twice. I talked extensively about every community in my riding. I provided recommendations for future MLAs, and I provided recommendations for the boundary commission to consider. I'm proud of that work that I did, and I'm proud of the report that the boundaries commission did because they didn't just take my word for it; they talked to other people in Banff-Kananaskis and other people across Alberta to create the majority report, and that is what that report is based on.

If the members opposite are concerned about effective representation for rural areas, Mr. Speaker, they should follow me for more tips, because I have a lot of ways that I connect with my rural constituents. I do it in person. I do it online. I do it in a coffee shop. I do it at a community barbecue. I go for hikes with people. I go for boat rides with people. I go for dog walks, and I meet people literally on the side of the road as they're passing through my riding. There are a million ways that you can connect with your constituents, and the shape and size of your riding should not necessarily influence how well you do your job. What influences how well you do your job is the effort you put in, so I don't need a different-shaped riding to do better. I'm pretty awesome. I do great.

**Member Arcand-Paul:** Yeah, you are.

**Dr. Elmeligi:** I am. Thank you. I am pretty great.

The one thing about this that is the most important thing to remember is that politics does not belong in this conversation. How we feel as politicians doesn't matter. It doesn't matter if you think it's fair or hard or easy or whatever, because the boundary commission has already considered all of that, and they created the majority report which we are here to accept and then move forward with our jobs, which is representing our constituents.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that the UCP should keep their noses out of the boundaries, first. Second, I just want to thank the boundaries commission, because I think that it's really hard work. I think about how difficult it would be to weigh all of the different views and perspectives that they heard to create the majority report and to really think about each of these boundaries and the communities and trying to make sure that population growth and effective representation and urban and rural ridings are represented. That is no easy task, and they did a phenomenal job travelling the province, talking to thousands of Albertans. I want to thank them because I think this is really hard work, and they did it really well while maintaining their independence and creating ridings that serve the people, not that serve those of us in this room.

I have a large riding and I can't be everywhere all the time. I know that many of the members opposite are the same, but I also encourage the members opposite to reflect on times when their riding boundary was different, because changing from Banff-Canmore to Banff-Kananaskis changed everything for the people in my riding. It suddenly made people think that their votes mattered,

their individual vote counted, that it was worth reaching out to their MLA to have a conversation because their issues were important, and that is what we're talking about here, Mr. Speaker. We're talking about making sure that people feel represented, that they can reach out to their MLA, and the majority report from the boundaries commission does that.

Thank you.

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

**Member Arcand-Paul:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to echo the comments from my friend from Banff-Kananaskis, where I want to thank the boundary commission and the thousands of Albertans who made submissions to the Electoral Boundaries Commission for their hard work and for their protection of democracy, because their job and working here is to ensure that this process remains free from bias, and political bias particularly.

Today we have another day and another opportunity for the UCP to spin and show Albertans how entitled and out of touch they are with all Albertans. They are also, might I add, quite undemocratic in doing it by introducing time allocation for the umpteenth time in this session. Worse yet, the UCP have demonstrated their very failure again in this motion. Alberta has grown. This government's own throne speech fancifully stated how the UCP expected the province to grow, without addressing things like investments in health care, schools, or even to account for these new Albertans in each one of our ridings.

Mr. Speaker, I see it every single day in Edmonton-West Henday. How do the members opposite not see it? Are they that entitled that they ignore the two largest cities in Alberta, who are bursting at the seams? Under the majority report I represent the third-most populated riding in Alberta, alongside another Edmonton riding and one in Calgary. Yet this government wants to punish all Albertans for the UCP's ineptitude to plan and think ahead by rigging the next election. Albertans can see through this government's failure after failure, and I can't wait for that day when they kick them to the curb under the majority report's map.

Had the government done its job, it would have prepared for this growth. They could have accounted for these additional two seats instead of now using their own failures to redraw the boundaries ahead of the next election with political interference. Albertans see right through it, Mr. Speaker, on all sides of the political spectrum. Folks see it as undemocratic and either are disgusted or justify it to stifle anyone who does not agree with them. We have the responsibility of balancing both sides of these perspectives. It was the task of the independent boundary commission. The introduction of this motion, with closure might I add, discounts the thousands of Albertans and the independent boundary commission's majority report in a departure from precedent here in Alberta and across Canada.

We can see this undemocratic conservative party undo all of the work by the boundary commission and this alleged independent advisory panel in section C(h), where the UCP are trying to subvert even the process of this allegedly independent panel by giving the chair full authority in the event of a split, to not require a balance of both sides by allowing the chair to make the decision for the entire independent panel. Another error in drafting, or perhaps it's intentional. Only time is going to tell, Mr. Speaker. The independence of this panel is a smokescreen and nothing more as this motion appoints the Member for Leduc-Beaumont as the chair with three other UCP members and two opposition members, with the majority decisions clearly coming from the cabinet and the UCP.

Make no mistake. All throughout this process the UCP is attacking democracy, and today is no different: through gerrymandering, while closing debate, while offending the history of this Chamber, offending all members in this House who are all elected here to represent millions of Albertans, offending precedents of our great province and our great country. To paraphrase my friend from Edmonton-Whitemud: this is about the fragility and importance of democratic values and norms that will crumble if we don't all stand up to defend them, regardless of what party we represent.

5:50

Mr. Speaker, we do have guidance on this from Pincher Creek's very own daughter, Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin, in reference re provincial electoral boundaries Saskatchewan, also known as the Carter decision from 1991.

What are the conditions of effective representation? The first is relative parity of voting power. A system which dilutes one citizen's vote unduly as compared with another citizen's vote runs the risk of providing inadequate representation to the citizen whose vote is diluted. The legislative power of the citizen whose vote is diluted will be reduced, as may be access to and assistance from his or her representative. The results will be uneven and unfair representation.

Mr. Speaker, if the UCP were truly implementing the majority report, they would do so plainly as previous governments have in this province, including former Premier Notley, not creating a kangaroo court led by the UCP to arrive at their predetermined boundaries for the province, one which runs the risk of ignoring the votes of all Albertans.

Because of the comments opposite I do have to ask: why does the UCP hate Albertans living in Edmonton and Calgary so much? They are still Albertans. They showed up at the boundary commission hearings. Their opinion formed the majority report along with Albertans from rural Alberta.

Worse yet, the UCP is trying to water down the voice of rural Albertans. Heck, just the other day the Premier said that she was sure that I love rural Alberta, and I sure do. I very, very much do, just like all the members on this side of the House who come from the beautiful rural First Nations, towns, and hamlets. It is my home, Mr. Speaker. I come from the Alexander First Nation, not the Alex First Nation, with no disrespect to wherever that might be.

This process will undoubtedly ignore the recommendations made by several Indigenous leaders, rural Albertans, those very electors and groups that made submissions to ensure that effective representation of Indigenous peoples in this province would be effected through this process. Look around, Mr. Speaker. There are zero Indigenous peoples across the aisle and two in His Majesty's Loyal Opposition. Even if by chance one of the two of us on this side gets on to that UCP-led committee, it will not guarantee that those perspectives will be incorporated to ensure effective representation.

I was very proud of all of those First Nations people and Métis folks that made submissions urging the boundary commission to do that good work of ensuring Indigenous voices, especially in like-minded communities, were included, taking in the heated advice from Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin in the Carter decision to ensure their votes would count.

Again, why would this government worry about not incorporating these perspectives into their decision-making? Why would they not just adopt the majority report as is? It's not hard to see that their record on Indigenous relations is – well, I'm not confident, and I think there are a few others that have the same opinion.

This government's motion to diminish the powers of Albertans does just that. It liquidates our democracy from our institutions for their own political gain, and today's limit on debate . . .

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Government Motion 39, agreed to earlier today, which states that after one hour of debate all questions must be decided to conclude debate on Government Motion 37, I must now put that question to the House.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 37 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:54 p.m.]

[Three minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Al-Guneid	Elmeligi	Kayande
Arcand-Paul	Eremenko	Metz
Batten	Ganley	Miyashiro
Boparai	Goehring	Nenshi
Brar, Gurinder	Gray	Pancholi
Brar, Gurtej	Guthrie	Renaud
Ceci	Haji	Sabir
Chapman	Hayter	Schmidt
Dach	Hoffman	Shepherd
Deol	Ip	Sweet
Eggen	Irwin	Tejada
Ellingson	Kasawski	Wright, P.

Totals: For – 44 Against – 36

[Government Motion 37 carried]

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, it is 6 p.m., and as such the House stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

## Table of Contents

Prayers .....	1561
Introduction of Guests .....	1561
Statement by the Speaker	
110th Anniversary of Women's Suffrage .....	1561
Members' Statements	
Alberta in Canada .....	1561
Canadian Nationalism .....	1562
Electoral Boundaries .....	1562
Federal Strategy to Protect Nature .....	1562
Tourism Levy .....	1562
Highway 3 Twinning .....	1563
Tabling Returns and Reports .....	1563
Tablings to the Clerk .....	1563
Oral Question Period	
Electoral Boundaries .....	1563
Provincial Fuel Tax .....	1565, 1570
Energy Development Policies .....	1566
Surgical Wait Times .....	1567
Alberta Separatism .....	1567
Wildfire Prevention and Control .....	1568
CORE Study on Supervised Drug Consumption Sites .....	1568
Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement .....	1569
Hospital Workplace Safety .....	1570
Highway 14 Capital Plan .....	1571
Orders of the Day .....	1571
Government Motions	
Select Special Committee on Electoral Boundaries .....	1571, 1588
Division .....	1594
Time Allocation on Government Motion 37 .....	1584
Division .....	1587

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For inquiries contact:

Editor

*Alberta Hansard*

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875

E-mail: [AlbertaHansard@assembly.ab.ca](mailto:AlbertaHansard@assembly.ab.ca)