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The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, May 6, 2026

Day 54

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

Second Session

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Progressive Tory: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 6, 2026

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 28 Municipal Affairs and Housing Statutes Amendment Act, 2026

[Adjourned debate May 5: Mr. Haji]

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

Ms Chapman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pleased to rise and offer a few comments on Bill 28, Municipal Affairs and Housing Statutes Amendment Act. This is another one of these really big omnibus bills. We're touching a whole bunch of pieces of legislation here. I don't have a ton of time, so I'm going to try to work through it pretty quick.

I did want to start with the changes that have been made to the Libraries Act, and I'm going to start there simply because I have a letter from a constituent that I would like to share on the issue. I received this just today, actually, so very timely. My constituent, Amanda, thanks so much for e-mailing this to me today, and I'm happy to share your concerns here in the Legislature. Amanda wrote – great name by the way – to tell me:

Bill 28 deeply concerns me. It restricts access to public library materials. That is censorship. It also takes decisions away from locally governed public libraries and replaces them with province-wide rules. Parents already decide what their children read. Public libraries support families; they do not replace them. Please stand up for local decision-making and freedom from censorship and call for a pause on Bill 28. I stand with my public library.

Thank you, Amanda, for sharing those concerns, and of course, there are a number of organizations that have expressed concerns about the changes made to the Libraries Act with this bill.

Now, I'll start by reminding the Chamber because I don't know if everyone was able to see the polling that was done by Janet Brown on this issue in January of this year. In Janet's polling she found that 82 per cent of Albertans trust public libraries to make appropriate decisions about materials, and that's a lot higher than the 46 per cent who trust the government of Alberta when it comes to that same question. I do have a question for the Minister of Municipal Affairs on why he felt that this change was necessary given that public support and trust in libraries is as high as it is.

The Coalition of Alberta Public Libraries, kind of the umbrella organization for libraries here in Alberta, serves 99 per cent of Albertans. Alberta public libraries get 38 million visits a year. Thirty-seven million items are borrowed a year, but at least 10,000 of those are my kids just checking out *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* and *Dog Man* over and over and over again.

The reason that I mention graphic novels like that is because those are the graphic novels that children are checking out in the library. The wonderful thing about libraries, Mr. Speaker, is that they're already, you know, designed with rooms for certain ages. We're regulars at our public library, have been since my kids were little. The kids' room is, you know, easily one of our favourite places to be and to sort of while away an hour, and there is so much in there for those kids, so much that draws their eye and draws their

attention. You know, my kids have never really wanted to wander too far from that section.

I do want to talk about a few specific issues that Coalition of Alberta Public Libraries have raised when it comes to the changes in Bill 28, and of course, when we get to the next stage of this bill, I'm hoping that the minister will be able to respond to these concerns. When it comes to regulation-making authority over access, the Coalition of Alberta Public Libraries says,

This bill would give the minister the power to make regulations restricting who can access, use, or borrow public library materials based on age. This is new as no such authority currently exists in the Libraries Act [and] the bill does not define what materials would be restricted, what age thresholds would apply, or how restrictions would be enforced.

Those are details, I gather, that will come later in legislation.

I noticed the same thing myself, Mr. Speaker, when I did my initial read of this bill, and to be honest found myself feeling a little bit shocked that the government was willing to write legislation that allowed for the government to control what materials any member of the public would be allowed to check out from their public library.

Now, I know there are specific examples that the minister has provided of materials he doesn't want children to have access to, but that is not what the legislation in front of us says, Mr. Speaker. The legislation is not specific to what materials will be restricted access. The legislation merely says that the Minister of Municipal Affairs has the power to restrict access, and I certainly have a problem with that.

There are a number of other pieces of this legislation. The library piece in my mind is not even – certainly, it's a big issue. I'm sorry. I don't mean to minimize the issues that are there, but I have actually quite a few concerns about the pieces around control over off-site levies. It is hard for municipalities these days, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker has some awareness and familiarity with the challenges that municipalities have, particularly when it comes to managing development . . .

The Speaker: I appreciate the generous and kind tenor of your remarks, but the Speaker is not to be brought into debate at any point. I'm not offended; it's not a problem. It's just, I hope, a gentle reminder, okay?

Ms Chapman: Yeah. Taken well, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The changes that have been made to off-site levies: of course a number of municipalities have raised concerns about this because what it does is it restricts what items municipalities are allowed to cover with off-site levies. This is a really great piece of news for developers, and of course, we know developers have been lobbying this government very heavily. I am certain that developers are very excited about what they see in Bill 28, but for municipalities and for the taxpayer I would suggest we are less excited. The Minister of Municipal Affairs apparently doesn't believe that we should use off-site levies to cover the costs of things like fire trucks. Yeah, sure, you build a library, but heck no, you can't get an off-site levy to actually cover the cost of the books.

Mr. Williams: Will the member accept an intervention?

Ms Chapman: I only have a few minutes, Minister. Please let me get through my comments.

Alberta Municipalities has a really specific concern when it comes to off-site levies. They say that the proposed changes limit municipal autonomy and the ability for municipalities to cover certain costs through off-site levies under the principle of growth paying for growth. Any limits to the ability of municipalities to raise

revenue to cover costs is concerning, especially during a time of increased pressure on the property tax base.

Now, when I was trying to do some reading about what was happening in this bill, overwhelmingly the commentary that I found from municipalities, whether they be our big urban centres, whether they be organizations like RMA, was a lot of concern about provincial overreach. I know the minister would like to say that municipalities are a creature of the province and it's not stepping out of their lane because it's not like the relationship between the federal and provincial government. I would suggest that we have local leadership and local decision-making for a reason.

Those of us who believe that decisions about land-use planning, about community design standards, should be informed by our communities. The idea that, you know, a minister who lives 1,000 kilometres away from our city has given himself the power to sweep in and override the decisions that our local leaders have made with, I will point out, sometimes thousands of hours of consultation – when a city does land-use planning, I understand that the minister might not like the result of it, but the fact is that in the process of land-use planning that our municipalities do is baked in a deep level of public consultation.

7:40

My city, the city of Calgary, does an incredibly excellent job of public consultation, because what they don't do is just, you know, put up a survey on their website with a bunch of loaded questions, host town halls in the evening where whoever has the privilege to have that time off and no kids to care for can show up. No. They go out of their way to do public consultation in public spaces to ensure that they are capturing data not just from those who have the privilege to attend a session but in places where people are, for example in a public library or in a public rec centre. They make sure to set up in a space there so that they can collect feedback from people who live in the community about what they want that community to look like. I am deeply offended that this government thinks that they should override all of that work.

What I didn't see in here, Mr. Speaker, was any sort of indication about how this happens. The minister has given himself the power to overwrite these community design codes. What sort of consultation is he going to do to do that? What is the application process? Who will lobby him for these changes? How will this process be public, fair, and transparent? To suggest that cities are – I don't know – like a toddler, I guess, is truly a ridiculous insult to local leadership. They're not children. Whatever you want to say about them being legislated creatures of the province, we're not electing a council of children to make decisions about land-use planning. We are electing competent adults who we believe are representing the voices of our local communities.

Suffice to be said, for many reasons – I didn't have time to get to them all – I will not be supporting Bill 28.

Thank you.

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

Member Eremenko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Very happy to be able to stand briefly and speak to Bill 28. I think municipal governments are exceptional. Truly, the closer a government is to the real, ground-level activities and interests and concerns of their constituents, there is just so much opportunity. I think I will just leave a little ode to city charters. I was on the table once upon a time when it came to finding special agreements between our two largest cities in the province because of the very unique nature of those very large cities and the challenges of having a single Municipal Government Act that is meant for both the

hamlet of Priddis and cities, like Calgary and Edmonton, of over a million people.

I think that there is so much that can happen at the city level, at the municipal level, at the city council level, where the province can be a real partner. Unfortunately they come across as more of a parent more often than not, where they exercise great control. We've heard it before. As my colleague from Calgary-Bedlington has mentioned, you know, cities are creatures of the province, but they have governments that are duly elected with elections that are run with transparency and integrity. The sets of issues, the considerations, the financial constraints: all of those pieces are, in fact, very unique for city council. I can at least speak for Calgary's city council right now that I'm delighted at the work that is happening there, and I think that they are serving Calgarians very, very well.

I want to just point out a couple of pieces in Bill 28 before we move on for the rest of the evening, a couple of things that I have heard from stakeholder groups, you know, particularly the large ones like ABmunis and RMA, a few things that they like about this bill, and I think I would probably concur. One is around efforts to modernize the property assessment framework and the formula. I think that is long overdue, probably about 20 years now since those changes have been introduced. A lot of those times people see that property tax bill come in and they think this is not necessarily reflective of life in 2026, living in my city. Glad to see that that is forthcoming. I know that the introduction of some accountability framework for councillors is also welcome. So, you know, credit where that's due.

I'd like to, though, focus on a couple of other pieces that I think would be of particular concern, I know, for my constituents in Calgary-Currie. I reckon that many of my colleagues who represent inner-city ridings in Calgary and Edmonton might also agree. One of them is around the changes to the community design codes. Bill 28 would allow for the minister to create rules around things like architectural styles, districting, frontage standards and heights, historical architectural styles, landscaping, parks and open spaces, parking, and street design.

There is an immense, almost incalculable amount of resources that are put in by residents, volunteers, civil servants, businesses, and civil society groups who contribute at the most kind of granular level to area redevelopment plans, to local area plans, also to main street initiatives, for example. A great deal of very grassroots place-making happens where sometimes only the people who live and know those places most intimately can actually contribute to the ways that we can be making it better, and of course they want to because they are invested in their community.

In Calgary-Currie alone over two years, two to three years of work went into building out the Westbrook local area plan. We are currently in the throes of the 10th Avenue main street initiative down in Sunalta in Calgary-Currie. I know that communities are deeply invested in their area redevelopment plans. That is a busy enough space, Mr. Speaker, that we don't need the minister weighing in on these considerations that he really doesn't have any – no real vested interest, certainly not like the person who lives a couple of blocks away.

The other thing, though, that I think – there is a real cautionary tale that has happened in Calgary in the last little while since this recent council got elected, and that is around the introduction of the blanket rezoning bylaw. Now, I am not interested in opening up that can of worms today in terms of very different opinions and then everything in between about blanket rezoning. But Bill 28 introduces a pathway to exactly that, an automatic yes. I would encourage the minister to sit in or maybe read on the transcripts from recent Calgary city council meetings with three weeks, I think,

of public hearings of Calgarians once again showing up, writing in, weighing in on their opinions on blanket rezoning.

City council had precisely that. They had created the framework for an automatic yes. Let me tell you, it went over like a lead balloon in many corners of our city. I think it begs the question to what extent the minister cared to consult Calgarians on that particular issue, on this phenomenon of an automatic yes. Per the ministry's own information sheet it is supposed to, you know, expedite the approval process, address housing shortages, and address housing affordability because we have taken away this incredibly burdensome regulatory process that builders have to go through. But it has not been unanimously supported by any means.

I would certainly hope that the minister and his staff would take some time and consider how the province might be able to apply the principle of an automatic yes, perhaps, but, as I said, taking a bit of a cautionary tale in terms of what happened in Calgary. We have got to identify the barriers that are slowing down the development and the building and the construction of homes. We've got some very real challenges around housing affordability and affordable housing. Those are two different things.

7:50

I think if Bill 28 is going to meaningfully tackle that particular challenge, then let's not go through the process that city council has gone through, three years and more of doing the consultation, introducing the bylaw, seeing that play out for a period of time, electing a new council, and then going through an entirely new round of public consultation only to have the entire bylaw repealed and going right back to where we were 36 months ago. It is a waste of everybody's time. It is a waste of resources, and perhaps this might be one of those opportunities where, rather than the province telling cities what to do, maybe the province could learn a thing or two from the city.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Government House Leader has moved that we adjourn debate on second reading of Bill 28. If you are in favour, please say aye. All those opposed – oops. I'm getting a look. One minute please.

I think the hon. Government House Leader moved the motion, which means he is unable to speak again on second reading. If someone else wants to move adjournment, we can do that. The hon. deputy government whip.

Mr. Wright: Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 32

Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2026

[Adjourned debate May 6: Mr. Schow]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: I have no further comment.

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

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm unequivocally against Bill 32 and these undemocratic actions by this government

to redraw the riding maps of Alberta. They had the chance to do this in Bill 31 in 2024, but they did not. Hmm, Mr. Speaker, I wonder why that is. Is it partisanship? Politics? Well, I think Albertans are getting a clearer picture as to why, both with this bill now and last week with the UCP's motion they gleefully passed to create their politicized committee because they were unhappy with the independent office of the boundary commission. They had the upper hand in appointing those members as well.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite know separation of powers. I heard it in here just the other day during debate as the members opposite heckled the opposition that they understand the separation of powers. Independent legislative offices are part of that process. Perhaps one of those armchair critics will be able to inform their cabinet and caucus about the separation of powers and the importance of our independent offices who do this important work for Albertans. This independent boundary commission delivered a report to this Chamber with a typo might I add, and that typo was further clarified by the chair of the commission that this bill is predicated on because this UCP government wants to further its attacks on democracy in this province. This bill and the mustang court that this bill will be empowered by the UCP-led committee to add four additional seats in this province: they had that opportunity to add those additional seats back in 2024. Again, they did not.

Let's be crystal clear about the acts of the UCP. This committee will have absolutely zero transparency to Albertans. I'm concerned about the secrecy that this government intends to go into this committee after the NDP introduced motions to increase transparency, reduce partisan interference, and mitigate harm caused to our democracy by this secret committee, where they may be influenced by external parties.

Let's be clear even further, Mr. Speaker. My colleague from Calgary-Mountain View mentioned her participation on this committee is to ensure that there is an element of transparency to Albertans because in the way that it's currently drafted there is no transparency. This committee is illegitimate. We have a process. It should have been followed, and the UCP rewriting the rules is nothing more than eroding our democracy for their own gain.

Mr. Speaker, I say this because reports are showing that there are foreign actors that are interfering in the province of Alberta given the political climate that the UCP want to cover their ears over. They want to pretend that nothing is happening. I'm speaking about the separatists that have taken over their party . . . [interjections] I do believe that it is why the UCP are laughing right now. They are absolutely certain that separatists are within their party . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Only one member has the floor. Let's hear from that member.

Member Arcand-Paul: That is exactly why the UCP want to cover their ears to this conversation and not assure Albertans that separatism is not something that they want.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are concerned about this foreign interference in our democracy. In a report released just today, that I'll table tomorrow, titled Decision Making and National Unity under Threat: Foreign Interference, Cognitive Sovereignty, and the Alberta Referendum by Marcus Kolga, Jennie Phillips, Brian McQuinn, Bartel Van de Walle it states:

When external actors amplify separatist narratives, normalize annexation, encourage national rupture, or undermine confidence in democratic processes, the issue is no longer . . . a matter of provincial politics. It becomes a direct threat to Canada's democratic integrity, national security, and cognitive sovereignty.

The FBI's 2024 Doppelgänger affidavit [includes] the publication and amplification of disinformation, deployment of regime-aligned proxies and influencers, and the creation of fake websites and social media groups through which false narratives can be introduced and spread. Alberta separatism is precisely the kind of domestic fault line these instructions describe. As early as 2019, the Russian state media platform Sputnik took an interest in the fringe Western separatist fringe movement known as Wexit.

The report goes on to say,

Canadians should anticipate an intensification of such operations in the months leading up to any referendum, including narratives designed to cast doubt on democratic processes, Elections Alberta, the media, and individuals or groups opposed to separation.

Interventions that invest in trust before the campaign begins are therefore not preparatory; they are the primary defence.

Mr. Speaker, what this bill and the subsequent motion passed by the UCP do is undermine our democracy at a time where Alberta and Canada are vulnerable to the threat of foreign interference by external actors. This is not a myth anymore. This is reality, and it is something that we as legislators should be on high alert to. Breaking our democracy by ignoring the work of our independent offices like the boundary commission, that majority that wrote a report, and creating a mustang court with a UCP-led committee does not inspire confidence in our democratic institution. In fact, it does the opposite.

Ignoring the result of a referendum by removing daylight savings time by decree rather than listening to the will of the people who voted by referendum, it is a death of our democracy by a thousand cuts, and Albertans have had enough... [interjection] It is dangerous, and I hear the member opposite laughing at this. This should be concerning that the members of government are laughing at the death of democracy. Hear them, Alberta. Hear them. Very concerning. It is dangerous.

While our province has grown, the UCP had the opportunity to do the right thing in 2024. It was in one of their throne speeches, for heaven's sake, but again they chose not to. Instead they laugh about democracy being eroded and foreign actors participating in creating this interference.

Mr. Speaker, this is concerning. It is for these reasons I urge all members in this Chamber to vote against...

The Speaker: Forgive me.

Members who haven't been recognized, there are places to have loud conversations that aren't in here. Find one of those, or perhaps listen to the person speaking.

8:00

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is for these reasons that I urge all members in this Chamber to vote against this bill, because our democracy is the most fragile it has ever been, and we as the protectors of democracy must be ever vigilant given the global context we find ourselves in.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 32, the Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2026. Like my colleagues, I'm also opposed to this bill. The bill increases the number of ridings in Alberta from 89 to 91. I'm not opposed to that as an idea, but I'm more opposed to the reasoning why we're having this conversation. The government wants to make it sound like this is to improve or increase rural

representation, but it's actually so that they can win a majority government for the foreseeable future. I'm disturbed by that because this is injecting politics into a process that is supposed to be entirely independent, and that is problematic.

By introducing this bill and this illegitimate process, the government is choosing to ignore the input of thousands of Albertans who participated in the independent commission process. They're ignoring the recommendations of the nonpartisan Electoral Boundaries Commission, and that should be concerning to us all. These processes are designed to be independent from politics because politicians have no business drawing the lines on the map. We set the parameters by which the independent boundaries commission makes their decisions after they have consulted with thousands of Albertans. It is our job to accept that majority report as written.

Really, the government should pass the majority report that was created through that independent process, but instead they've created this whole new illegitimate process that we're really only participating in because we have a duty to defend democracy. I think all of us in this House have that duty, regardless of what side or what party we sit with.

I do think that this is the most antidemocratic action ever, and I think that this government has taken several antidemocratic actions over the last three years. There have been multiple bills that I felt, and my colleagues felt, have disrupted the foundation of our democracy, and that is concerning. We're only changing the number of ridings now because the government didn't like the majority report, which is politicizing this independent process. It's stripping away voters' rights to fair elections, and that is concerning.

I'm very upset that public consultation is not going to be a part of this new MLA committee or the panel that will be consulted on that. The public consultation in this process is really important, Mr. Speaker, because nobody knows their community better than the people who live in that community.

Even just today I received a letter from the MD of Foothills, Okotoks, and Diamond Valley sharing with me, as an MLA that has part of the MD of Foothills in my current riding, their concerns and details about how they work together as municipalities and why they provided the recommendations that they did to the Electoral Boundaries Commission to stay together, because they already work together. It's just like when I presented to the boundaries commission, I talked about how Banff and Canmore and the MD of Bighorn have a lot of partnerships and work together. It only makes sense for those things to be in the same provincial riding and work with one MLA.

Similarly, I've been fielding text messages from people across my riding who are very concerned about how we currently, in Banff-Kananaskis, don't know what our riding is going to look like. The majority report and the minority report are very different from each other, and that's causing a lot of stress and anxiety amongst my constituents and the elected officials in my riding as well.

Recommendation 5 in the majority report is the one that this government is hitching this bill to that increases the number of ridings to 91, but it was only signed by one member of the commission, and it was for the express purpose of dissuading the Legislature from accepting the minority report. It was not meant to detract from the majority report, and it does not represent the views of the majority of the commission. You can't take one sentence from a multihundred-page document and then create a whole new illegitimate process to address it. That is just not fair, and it's not what these independent processes are created to do.

In the Select Special Committee on Electoral Boundaries we proposed a series of motions meant to increase transparency, to

assure Albertans that for this process, even though it's illegitimate and doesn't really belong here, we could at least have some transparency and predictability and reduced partisan interference to mitigate the harm caused by the creation of this process in the first place. The result was that the UCP denied every single one of the motions that our NDP MLAs brought forward.

The result is that there will be secret meetings between the committee and the advisory panel – those are allowed – that external partisan influencers and their maps are allowed, and that those meetings, those deals, those interactions do not have to be reported to the public. There's no requirement for bipartisan support of results, and so many more things. Each of these things reduces transparency in a process that, really, we owe it to the people of Alberta to be as transparent as possible about. This is the foundation of how people vote and how we create the structure of this House and how Albertans are involved in creating the structure of this House.

To be honest with you, Mr. Speaker, I feel like the members on the opposite side of the aisle should all be very ashamed when they go home and think about what they're doing to the democracy of our province. Democracy is a gift that we give each other. It is not something that we can take for granted. There are a lot of people in the world who don't have it, and we should be very careful about how we treat it.

The members opposite have talked about how this is to improve rural representation. Well, when we debated the motion, Mr. Speaker, I shared some tips with the members opposite on how to improve rural representation. I just want to share that those tips came from my personal experience over the last three years as a rural MLA in this House, representing not only my constituents but some of their constituents as well. I receive e-mails from a whole schwack – that's a lot, by the way – of rural Albertans who are not being represented by their MLAs. They are coming to me, asking me to represent them in this House.

So here's what I have done. I have travelled all across this province. I've gone to a lot of small towns. I've met with a lot of people and a lot of stakeholders. As the shadow minister of Environment and Protected Areas a lot of those conversations centred around environmental issues. That's no surprise. In every single one of these examples that I'm about to cite, Mr. Speaker, constituents came to me and told me that their MLAs were unavailable to them, that they had reached out to their MLAs, and their MLAs did not respond. So they were coming to me because they felt brushed off and disrespected and ignored.

Mr. Schow: Intervention?

Dr. Elmeligi: No.

I am representing those rural MLAs today in this House because their MLAs are not.

I have talked about fracking, the impacts of fracking on drinking water. I've talked about gravel pits and the concerns around dust and water availability. I've presented a petition about feral horses, logging and reforestation concerns, caribou recovery, coal mining, and all of the lack of public consultation and everything else around that, public consultation around a whole bunch of things like AI data centres. I've also talked about cervid harvest preserves; cumulative effects management in the headwaters, including lawsuits from First Nations; First Nations' rights to clean water and land rights; private property issues related to farming, ranching, water availability, recreation and tourism, and flaring limits. I have spoken about all of these things in this House because their MLAs did not want to, Mr. Speaker.

So if the idea is to improve rural representation, I highly recommend the members opposite talk to their constituents. Return their e-mails, return their calls, and meet with them. They shouldn't have to come to me. I'm not their MLA. I'm happy to talk to them. I mean, they're all really amazing people, but that shouldn't be my responsibility.

I also want to give a shout-out to some of my colleagues, especially my colleague from Edmonton-Manning who spends just as much time connecting with rural Alberta as I do and who does not represent an entirely rural riding.

To improve rural representation in the House, Mr. Speaker, we don't need more seats. We need MLAs who are better at their jobs. That's all. This government should be ashamed that in order to increase rural representation they need to change the maps, they need to politicize an independent process. All they really have to do is show up for their constituents and connect with their constituents and bring those concerns into this House, because that is their job.

Thank you.

8:10

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

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise to speak to Bill 32, Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2026. I really wanted to say in the beginning of my comments that it's very hard to collect your thoughts. What would you say about this bill? What we're seeing and what we're dealing with in this House through Bill 32 is very unprecedented in our province. This government created a commission, appointed members, the majority members of the commission, to conduct a report given by their mandate. So it gave them a mandate to work on in that commission. They spent almost 10 months working through a legal process, and, most importantly, going from one place to another in the province, in the cities, in small cities, in rural communities.

I do remember that I appeared a few times before the commission to provide feedback. There was a lot of enthusiasm, a lot of excitement in Albertans. You have to book an appointment. You have to find a time slot. So every time you were there, there were a lot of other people not from one party, not with one point of view, not from one particular community, not from one part of the city. I also, you know, spent the time to listen to those arguments. There were, like, all sorts of arguments and feedback shared with the boundary commission. Some of that you might agree with, or some you might not agree with, but the commission did that whole work listening to Albertans, looking at the mandate, and then presented their interim report in this House in the last session.

By then there didn't seem to be any problem with that report. The government didn't say anything other than that we've seen some UCP caucus staffers or government staffers speaking in a community with community members, showing them different maps, the maps they thought would be the final maps, not something that is in the interim report. They were trying to pursue support in the community in order to run their candidacy in those ridings, and the people were surprised. Like, "Where you are getting these maps from?" They said: "Oh, no. You don't know. Let the report come. This will be the final map," and that's what exactly happened. Unfortunately, when the final report was presented to the House, we saw something very unique, that it had a minority report attached to it.

The democratic process: my colleagues have talked about it, and I don't think we need to give a lesson in this House about what democracy is, how does it work. The UCP knows how many members they have, why they formed the government. They have

the majority of members, and on a routine basis we discuss the issues, debate the bills, and legislate the bills and create acts. At the end of the day, you know, on a lot of issues we do not agree. We have a different point of view. But at the end of the day, it's a political bill.

The UCP have a majority of members that came from their ridings, elected by the public, and the only reason they get that through is because they have more members, not any ethical reason, not any other legal reason. Every time we get up, it does not matter how much work we do to bring feedback from our communities and our constituencies, how valid our points are. When we stand up, they say: we have more members, and that's what democracy is. That's what they said. But not in this case.

The Electoral Boundaries Commission Act is very clear. Very clear. It has been working for years, decades. It is not the first instance that this Legislature is dealing with that process. The report is presented in this House. The Legislature has the right to approve it, adopt it, or reject it. But not in this case.

There's a reason why this is happening, a set pattern of a number of other things we have debated, another bill just a few minutes ago, Bill 28, and so many other bills in the House. The pattern of the UCP governance is totally out of touch with Albertans, and they know that. That's even a worse thing. It's unfortunate. Their acts show that they feel that, what they are doing, and Albertans don't like it. Albertans do not welcome them in their communities. The elections are coming next year at least, you know, if they don't come in between, and they're scared. Instead of learning from their own experience, they want to further damage the democracy to the extent, you know, that there's nothing even left after that if you go to this limit.

The voting process is the very basic tenet of the democratic principle, but that is not the only thing. There are so many other institutions. They work together to support the democratic process, to support our citizens, and help in many ways. In the past seven years, and specifically what happened after '23, they're continuously under attack, like what is happening in health care. I raised some questions even yesterday with the Infrastructure department. How many inquiries are under way? The Legislature officers' terms are even expiring, and they're struggling to get through the information so at least they can do their job because transparency is very important for democracy, for people's trust that your representatives listen to you and take your feedback and they work in the best interest of you only. There are a lot of issues.

8:20

You know, I go to a number of places in my community. My own point of view is very different, but once I am an elected representative of that community and that riding, my personal bias does not matter. I go to those places. I speak with those individuals, those organizations and listen to their experiences, and I always try to learn from them. That is my duty, to bring it back, not to involve my bias into it.

But in this such case, the UCP gave a mandate. Now they're not satisfied with their own mandate because the report did not come back in a way they thought would do them a favour. They don't want the people in Lethbridge to vote in one voice, they don't want people in Red Deer to vote in one voice because they're scared. What happened to the municipalities? Their relationships are not good with municipalities. What happened in Calgary after rising property taxes? It's directly impacting not politicians but everyday Albertans.

Unfortunately, we had a windfall of money. I didn't want to go there. The government have many, many options to deal with this.

At least when you do something – I understand this is a sometimes ideological debate, when you move in one direction, but also you learn from it. You learn from the feedback, the experience.

Instead of seeing any positive change, the government keeps moving to the destructive path, and I don't know how far they're going to go. I know somebody south of the border who tells his citizens that he is sent by a god to do all these things because he cannot justify. I hope we don't see that here.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very sorry to see this is happening in this House and we have to debate it. I once again request all members to please stop it here and vote against this bill.

Thank you.

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

Member Eremenko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Pleased to be able to stand and speak to Bill 32. Now, never has such a small bill said so much. Bill 32 reads: "The Electoral Boundaries Commission Act is amended by this Act . . . Section 13 is amended by striking out '89 proposed electoral divisions' and substituting '91 proposed electoral divisions.'" That's it. That's it. Never has such a small bill said so much and possibly, you know, embodied and exemplified the risk of so much harm. I'm pleased to be able to stand and speak to really how we got here.

Now, this, of course, pertains to the Electoral Boundaries Commission and a process that is supposed to be pretty standard. This was not our first rodeo in many ways. Every 10 years or so – I think it's after every two terms – it's quite an organized and co-ordinated affair to redraw the boundary map to accommodate and to adjust to growing populations and some different needs in different regions of the province. It really is quite a standard process, but this government has made a real mess of it, Mr. Speaker.

This is how it's supposed to go. There is supposed to be the enabling legislation. Check. We had that done. We had the amendment made, for example and primarily, to initially adjust the seats from 87 seats to 89. Those were the initial changes that were made in 2024 to enable the process to begin to get a commission. Check. From 87 to 89 enabling legislation was amended.

Then a commission is formed: two appointments from the Official Opposition, two appointments from the government, and one chair. Got that. The commission is tasked with travelling to every corner of this province, by road and by air and I reckon probably by foot sometimes, to hear from Albertans. Albertans certainly showed up in the thousands, more than any other Electoral Boundaries Commission process before. Albertans came out to talk about their communities, to talk about what mattered to them, and to help the commission make informed decisions about how this boundary redraw was going to be made. Public hearings: check.

Next step, we have an interim report. The interim report was released in October with unanimous support by all members of the commission: the chair, the two UCP appointees, and the two NDP appointees. Great. Everybody supports it. The map has 89 seats. Everything is ticking along. Then, as the process requires, the commission went back and circulated the interim report for another round of public hearings. Again people came out in record numbers. Everything is ticking along. And then the final step is that the final report is submitted to the public. It is submitted in these Chambers for us as legislators to accept the recommendation of the majority, of the commission.

At that point there are no more checks to be made here. The process falls apart, and it is exclusively because of the interventions of this government because they didn't agree with the majority map. But here's the thing, Mr. Speaker. It's not their call. It is not their

call. They manipulated the information held within that report and suggested that it didn't hold water, that the process was somehow flawed because the chair wrote in his report that he lamented that there weren't 91 seats in their mandate but, rather, the 89 that was in the legislation. A lamentation is not the same as a recommendation. If that were the case, my kids would have a pony. The chair lamented. He said: "You know what? This job would have been easier had we had 91 seats, but we had 89, and we did our jobs." I think that they deserve to be recognized for doing that job incredibly well, with great integrity and an immense amount of effort. But this government has thrown it out the window.

Per Government Motion 37 that was introduced a little while ago – it feels like a long time ago – from the member opposite: "urge the government to introduce a bill to amend section 13 of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act to provide for 91" seats instead of 89. That is what we have today in Bill 32. "Be it furthered resolved that a Select Special Committee on Electoral Boundaries be established to oversee an independent review of the electoral boundaries of Alberta." This work would occur "(i) on an expedited basis, and (ii) without a requirement to direct the holding of public hearings." The committee would be made up of MLAs, Mr. Speaker: three from the UCP government, two from the NDP Official Opposition, and then the chairperson of the committee would also be a UCP member.

Then they would be required to "engage independent advisors to serve on an independent advisory panel to carry out the mandate referred to in clause (e)," to essentially redraw. "The advisory panel's mandate is 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." In this case, there is zero assurance of fidelity to the public input, to the thousands of Albertans who wrote in and who participated in this process, nor any assurances that there would be any fidelity to the majority map that was presented to us, the only map under our consideration, the map that includes 89 electoral divisions.

8:30

Now, on or before October 22, 2026, the committee will submit a report based on its review. What of the work that came before it, Mr. Speaker?

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

It has all been thrown out the window, a process that followed convention, followed the law, followed the input of public contributors and participants to the process. They did their job and they fulfilled the mandate, I think, with a great deal of integrity until it came time to submit the final report, and now we have these various reports and all these other things.

Now, I can appreciate how Albertans, Madam Speaker, have had a challenging time keeping up, and I don't expect Albertans to keep track of all of the ins and outs and all of the ups and downs in this roller coaster of a ride that has been the Electoral Boundaries Commission. What I need for Albertans to understand is that this is not how the process is supposed to go. What Albertans need to know is that they should have confidence in the independence of this process, that politicians who have a direct stake in how that map is ultimately drawn should never be the ones who hold the pencils that draw that new map ever – ever – but that is precisely what this government has done.

They have thrown out the independent commission, they have thrown out any semblance of independence, and with Bill 32 introducing 91 seats, it runs parallel to a process that is about as biased as you can possibly be. No requirements to consider the public's contributions, no requirements to consider the notes of the

commission, no requirements to consider the map that was put forward to us as legislators, and it is shameful. Nobody with a straight face can possibly claim that this process is independent, and the only way for it to be trusted is that it has to be. It has to be independent.

Now this sham of a committee is getting together with some kind of a semblance of objectivity when we know full well, as in any other committee meeting that has taken place since I have been elected to this seat, that with the UCP holding the majority, we know and can presume the outcome of every single vote way ahead of time because that is how this government operates. That is how the committee will operate, and 91 seats, 89 seats: that's not the point. The point, Madam Speaker, is that this process stopped being independent a long, long time ago.

Politicians should not be drawing the maps where they get to choose their voters. Voters choose politicians. That is the only way that this should be operating.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others for Bill 32 in second reading? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 32, Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2026.

First, before I start to offer my short comments, I'd like to thank all of the St. Albertans who took the time to participate in this process. I know there are a lot of them. I got lots of e-mails. They were really excited to participate and wanted to learn more. I found it was really quite easy to get them engaged in politics as they prepared for this, so they were excited. Some of my constituents did submissions, some attended in person, and so I'd like to thank them.

Unfortunately, their hard work is about to be erased. It's unfortunate because we saw this commission take the time over a great deal of time, travelling across the province, hearing from Albertans, to create these maps. Are they perfect? No, but it was a process that we all agreed to.

Now I know a lot of my colleagues have stood up and offered comments on the specifics of this bill, what it does, and then, you know, the ridiculous committee that this government is now pointing to as this new democratic process that we know is just rigged. My colleagues are going to mention the kinds of motions that were made that were so good, but that really, sort of, provide astounding clarity about what this government wants to do. It's just so obvious. Anyway, it's very clear to me, Madam Speaker. It's clear to all of us. This is a government afraid of losing, and they're going to do whatever they can to keep their power.

Now, since we saw this piece of legislation – oh, my God. It feels like months. It's really only been not that long, but I have, like all of you, I'm sure, spent some time looking at different articles, listening to different podcasts. You know, I'm sure all of our algorithms on different social media sites are skewed to things that we agree with, so sometimes I actually make a point of looking at other things, and some people say: well, that's very partisan. Well, it's not.

One of the things I started doing was listening a little bit more to the Ryan Jespersen podcast. Now, I don't listen all the time. I actually found it's a perfect length for when I'm driving into work. I can fast forward through some bits, but it's a perfect length. There was recently an episode that – the reason I'm pointing it out is to encourage anybody watching tonight to have a look at it. Don't listen to us. We are all partisan beings here in this place. There's a reason that we sit on each side, but listen to some commentators that are not partisan.

On April 28 Ryan Jespersen had on two doctors, Dr. Jared Wesley and Dr. Feo Snagovsky. They were there to talk about the health of our democracy. They probably spent almost an hour talking about things. They talked about a book that's coming up, a couple of other topics, but they were really clear about the dangers here. What I really liked about what Feo said is that he talked about making all of their talk, their discussion, about what is a healthy democracy, focused on three questions. He made the questions simple enough to ask his elementary-school-aged child: "Does this work? So, if you were running for your school council, do these three things make sense to you?" And she said yes. One is: is government accountable? That makes a healthy democracy. Are the rules applied equally? Because that makes a healthy democracy. Is it actually serving the public? That makes a healthy democracy.

Madam Speaker, you know, I'm going to get into why these questions we can easily answer in this place in a bit, and they're not positive. While you're searching Ryan Jespersen podcast, have a little look a little lower down where there was an episode he did with the two big-city mayors. That was Mayor Jeromy Farkas and Mayor Andrew Knack. They were certainly talking about other things, but one of the last questions they talked about was – because this was just the timing that we were starting to see this. They were very clear, but they had been very clear in the earlier interview about this really genuine desire to want to work with this government. Now, I could insert my own thoughts here, but I will not.

They wanted to do what was best for their city and the people that lived in their city and the infrastructure in their city, and I love that. Actually, they wanted to be as nonpartisan as possible, to work with the government, but yet they were very clear and unapologetic about the fact that they disagreed with what is happening right now with this boundary commission report. They absolutely disagree with what this government is doing. That takes a lot of bravery, because we know this is a government that is not above calling people up and intimidating them and scaring them or threatening them. That's what they do.

Have a look at those episodes. See what you think. Have a look at other articles. Maybe go to sites that you don't typically go to. Try to open your minds a little bit and look at this, because what is happening right now will impact the health of our democracy. It will change the way people vote in the future. This is really a way of suppressing votes, just like this government did with vote tabulators, just like they're doing right now with flood the zone. Everybody's so completely overwhelmed, they're not even paying attention to the basic things, but this is deliberate, Madam Speaker.

We see it all over the place. There are some American cautionary tales that we should all be paying attention to. I love the fact that Canadians, most Canadians, don't know, most Albertans don't know, what gerrymandering is. Is that a dude? No, it's not. I'm glad that they didn't know what it meant because we're not used to it, because we value our democracy, and we work hard to protect it. I thought that's why we're all here. Apparently not.

We see what's happening in California and Texas, where you have a governor of California now gerrymandering. Of course, people in California voted on do they want to do that or not, because Texas has created a situation that is not fair. We see it happening all over the place.

8:40

I was listening to another podcast and they were talking about: a huge majority of Black Americans live in the southern states. What they found was that the gerrymandering is just nutty in the southern states. What they're doing is splitting up like-minded communities, cultural communities. What that does is dilute their political power.

People start to think: "Why the heck am I even showing up to vote? It doesn't matter." These political parties or these political beings no longer are accountable to their individual constituents because they're not afraid of losing. The only real contest is the nomination race. That's what they want because they're afraid of losing a general election fairly, and it's shameful.

With that, Madam Speaker, I'm going to take my seat.

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

Ms Goehring: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this evening to speak to Bill 32, the Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2026.

Listening to this debate, I think there's a lot that can be said about democracy and how this government determines that definition. I think that at the core of democracy we can look to a simple explanation. In Canada democracy is a system of government where power is vested in the people, exercised directly or through freely elected representatives. It promotes equality, human rights, and the rule of law. Key elements include fair elections, freedom of speech, and accountability, with systems often operating as parliamentary or constitutional democracies.

When we just look at that simple definition, it says that it's a government where power is vested in the people. A democracy is where the people elect their political representation. What this government is doing with this piece of legislation is selecting the voters. In the province we have an Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. That is a piece of legislation that dictates how those voters and areas in Alberta are determined. Typically it's every eight years. The government of the time creates the Electoral Boundaries Commission, they appoint people, and they do a very robust consultation with those that are involved in elections: Albertans, voters.

They've been all across the province in this last round. It has been reported as the highest turnout in people reaching out and submitting their opinions and their ideas. Nearly a million dollars were spent on this process. This is something that is very typical. It is expected to happen in the province because it's intended to listen to the voters, Albertans. It's intended to look at population growth. It's intended to look at areas where population is transitioning, and the commission takes all of that consultation. They then complete a report. It's an interim report, and then they give Albertans a second opportunity to go through that and provide submissions again.

I think this is very fair and just and it's been an accepted practice in the province and hasn't been overturned or torn up like this government has done in the history of the province. When we're listening to this government try to justify their reasoning, they pick one comment in the report and base it on that and throw everything out. They don't look at the one map that was proposed. They're completely disregarding what Albertans, thousands of Albertans, have provided. They've looked at research that the actual Electoral Boundaries Commission has done. They've looked at census. They've looked at population. They've looked at all of those things to compile this map, and now this government proposed a motion to change the number of seats that they want to see, and they have now created the Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, which is very clear is being done because this government is afraid of losing the election. The only way that they can ensure that is to fix election maps in their favour. We are looking at a government who is completely disregarding democracy, which is where the power lies within the people, not the power of the elected officials picking which people get to vote for them.

I think when we have the history of the last seven years of this government, we have seen over and over and over that democracy has not been a priority. Transparency has not been a priority. Proper consultation has been a major flaw when it comes to how this government proceeds with legislation. The amount of consultation that the Electoral Boundaries Commission has done far exceeds any previous map and report that has ever been done in Alberta, yet this government is taking that, ripping it up and creating their own select committee to go through and get the results that they want.

As part of this committee, Madam Speaker, the Alberta NDP put forward some amendments that would perhaps make this process a little bit more transparent, would reduce partisan interference, and ultimately try to reduce harm caused by this illegitimate process that's been created by the UCP, yet they were all defeated. Now, I'm not surprised because this is the process that the UCP have created to get the electoral map that they want, so of course they're going to defeat anything that actually reflects democracy and a fair and just process.

We have received unprecedented amounts of correspondence in my office, and Albertans are angry. They feel like they had an opportunity to share their voice, to share their insight and opinion on what they wanted to see with this new Electoral Boundaries Commission, and then all of that was completely disregarded and put into the hands of this government so that they can create a map that supports them winning the next election.

I know they're hearing the concerns that we're hearing. Albertans are concerned about the absolute disaster that has been created within the health care system. They're concerned about the corrupt behaviour that's happening when it comes to contracts and giving friends multimillion dollar contracts for things like Turkish Tylenol, that are sitting and paid for in storage units, not used. So they know that Albertans are angry. That would absolutely trigger this process to create a map that would ensure that they get another four years of power or eight years, because traditionally the electoral boundaries map is only done every eight years.

When I hear from community that they're outraged – their opportunity to give feedback and express concern was through the Electoral Boundaries Commission and was through the ability to have impact and have their voice heard, which has been the tradition of this Legislature since it has been created. Now, I'm very concerned that this is, of course, going to go ahead. I don't want to presuppose how this is going to play out, but I suspect that with their majority this, too, will go ahead despite concerns raised from so many across the province about the political interference being obvious, gerrymandering being the clear intention and the way to create an electoral map that guarantees they win the next election.

8:50

Now, I would really encourage all members in this House to look at why you chose to run. You believe in democracy. You believe in the province. You want to leave this province in a better place, and the way that we do that is to listen to voters, and the proper way to do that would have been to accept the report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission and not rip it up and create a map that clearly supports what they believe will be to win the next election.

I will be voting no on this piece of legislation, and I strongly encourage all members of this House to also vote no. Thank you.

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

Dr. Metz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am here today to speak to Bill 32, and I do want to start by thanking all of the people across Alberta who put a lot of time and effort into speaking to the boundaries commission. There were a number of people in

my own riding that spoke to this, but there were also people, really, everywhere across the province. I feel very sad that all of their efforts will go for naught and, like many other issues, they will just not be listened to.

I will be voting no to this, but I will say that there's one positive thing about this UCP government in Bill 32, which is that in the Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2026, they have taken the words "boring" and "anonymous" out of the work of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. We would have thought that this would be work that would just happen to maintain democracy, because we do tend to take democracy for granted here, most of us who have not had to face anything different.

This whole issue and this whole scenario that we're facing right now is really waiting for a very talented writer to create a really good Netflix series about this. I do think that it could be really interesting given the public's love for stories about the battle for power and doing anything to achieve it. It's kind of like our own *House of Cards*, although I really did not expect to be in the middle of watching it happen.

This particular story would begin with a government in power, a government that won with 49 out of 87 seats and had just 52.6 per cent of the popular vote. This was not a huge majority mandate, and they had lost 14 seats compared to the previous election. This government, in this nice series as we have here, did not run on many of the things that they have been doing since they gained power, and I will call it power rather than government because they are exercising power, not good governance. In fact, they have done the very opposite of many of the promises and the reassurances that were given to people. One would think that their chances of maintaining this absolute power might be somewhat at risk, so we get to the electoral boundaries legislation, Bill 32.

Every 10 years an independent commission reviews the boundaries because the province's population changes and redistributes. Notably, there has been a massive increase in growth in the province and ongoing redistribution, but the redistribution has largely been to urban areas, meaning that not only has the proportion of the population that is non-urban failed to grow but many of those ridings have actually decreased in their population. The principles of redistribution, however, are meant to be maintained.

One goal is to assure that all voters are represented, so there should be a roughly equal number of voters in each area that elects a member. Now, there is recognition that some areas have a very large area to cover, so there can be four ridings that can be 25 per cent lower than the average.

Another major goal is to keep the communities together or whole so that a community can be adequately represented with relatively similar needs and issues for someone to represent them. The process of reassessing these boundaries also requires a lot of public consultation. This assures that the citizens can speak to the principals and inform the boundary commission much more about their own community, because these are things that are ever-changing, and it allows an update in what is really going on in that locale.

Now, in the potential Netflix series the government seemed to have been quite shocked at the map that came out and that it really looked pretty fair, but – oh, my goodness – they were going to be losing a couple of rural ridings to account for this redistribution. This was going to be a problem because their power base was in the rural communities. That is not where the population growth has been. So by adding two more seats we really needed to be able to address that. But to keep this from being a boring story again, this political party really didn't win by very much, so they're afraid that these new maps weren't going to allow them to keep their power,

and now we needed to get into gerrymandering because while the Constitution requires that we have all of these processes and that certain rules be kept, this wasn't going to help them keep power.

They've decided to totally ignore democracy and have declined to accept the independent report of the boundaries committee. They're clutching at straws. They need to rewrite the report so it can potentially help them maintain their power. They will throw out the recommendations of the independent boundaries committee. This means they're going to gerrymander and fix election maps in their favour. They're ignoring the precedent that thousands of Albertans who participated in this independent commission will actually be heard. They're afraid of running a fair map, and they want to guarantee a map that keeps them in power.

This government is pursuing an alternative and an illegitimate process. This is the most antidemocratic action ever taken by an Alberta government. This bill is of course just one of the many steps this UCP government has been taking to rip away the rights of voters to freely and fairly choose the next government, and this Netflix series could dig into each of those other issues.

To get their way, to gerrymander the electoral boundaries, they have set up their own UCP-led process. They established a new select special committee. This committee will create an independent advisory panel accountable to the committee. This is a UCP-led committee as they have the majority and are not hearing the voices of members of the NDP.

They also initiated a second redistribution exercise rather than implementing the commission's report. The committee had their first meeting on May 4. Alberta New Democrats believe this process is illegitimate and are only participating to try and stop the bleeding and to protect the rights of Albertans. Many amendments were recommended to try to protect democracy, transparency, reduce partisan interference, and mitigate the harm, but all of these have already been shut down. There will be no requirement for public interviews or hearings, and everything can be done in secret.

9:00

We have not yet reached a conclusion in this series. We know where it's going. It's going to gerrymandering. But I guess we'll have to wait till the next season. We know who the villains are in doing this gerrymandering work, and we'll just have to hang on and see what happens next.

I will sit down and pass this on to one of my colleagues.

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

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I speak strongly against Bill 32, the Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2026. Any Canadian, any Albertan that believes in the democratic values of this province and country, our Canadian traditions of pluralism, of good governance, of responsible government would not and cannot support this bill.

Albertans should not be fooled. This is not a bill to just add two more seats regardless of what this government says. You know, this UCP government often likes to be flippant about things that are actually important. They like to gloss over their blatant autocratic leanings. The question before us is whether this government will respect an independent electoral boundaries process or whether they will allow their partisan members to step in after the fact because they did not like the result. That's actually what the bill should be called. That's really the question at the heart of this bill.

I recently had a very insightful visit with grade 6 students. I often like to visit schools and talk to young future leaders of our province.

They're learning about government and democracy. I asked them a simple question: who should draw the areas that each MLA represents? Should it be the politician themselves, or should it be someone else, someone independent? Madam Speaker, you know what they said? The vast majority of them agreed that it was better if someone else drew the boundaries. They said that it would be more fair, less self-serving. Now, again, remember, these are grade 6 students. Sometimes I wonder: if kids get it, why don't members on the other side of the House get it?

In Alberta and Canada we often govern by convention and tradition, not simply by codification. By tradition and good practice we do not simply let MLAs sit around a table and draw maps that affect their own political futures. We appoint an Electoral Boundaries Commission. No government prior to this one, the UCP, has interfered in that process, mind you. We ask the commission to study population changes, communities of interest, geography, growth pressures, and the principle of effective representation. We ask them to listen to Albertans. We ask them to hold public hearings and receive submissions. Then we ask the commission to report back to the Legislature and to the public.

Elections Alberta itself explains that the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act requires a commission to be appointed after the second general election following the last commission if at least eight years have passed and that each commission must report publicly on the information relevant to its recommendations. Madam Speaker, that's exactly what happened. The 2025-2026 commission was announced on March 28, 2025. That process happened. Albertans participated, many Albertans, a large number of Albertans. They wrote submissions. They attended hearings. They took the time to engage in a process that was supposed to be independent, nonpartisan, and legitimate.

The commission released an interim report in October of 2025. The interim report was agreed to by all five members of the commission, with no dissents. I just want to note that. Then, for some reason, on March 23, 2026, the commission published its final report. The chair and the two Alberta NDP-appointed members wrote the majority report, and the two UCP-appointed members wrote a minority report with alternative maps. Not just unorthodox, but unprecedented. It's never happened.

Now, it's clear that this government did not like where the independent process landed. So rather than accept the majority report, rather than respect the work that was done, rather than honour the Albertans who participated in good faith, the UCP is trying to create a new process, a political process, to get a different answer.

I know the government will say, "Well, the commission recommended 91 seats," but, Madam Speaker, that is not completely accurate. The official majority report was the report of the majority of the commission. It is the legitimate and only report. The addendum was written by the chair. It was not the majority report itself. In fact, I should make clear that the chair in the addendum included as a guardrail against minority maps explicitly clarified that his addendum did not detract from the majority report representing the views of the commission. What this government is trying to do is take one piece of that addendum, separate it from its context, and use it as a justification to reopen the whole process.

Let's be honest about what happened here. The UCP got a final report from an independent commission. They didn't like it, so they passed Government Motion 37, creating a Select Special Committee on Electoral Boundaries and directing the creation of a new advisory panel. That motion did not simply implement the commission's final report, as they should have and as any previous government would have done even if they didn't like it. Instead, this

government created a second, unprecedented process on a shortened or expedited basis after the original process had already concluded. By establishing a select special committee to oversee a new review of electoral boundaries, they've essentially handed over the pen, if you will, to a UCP majority to draw the maps.

Madam Speaker, I think that if you talk to any Albertan, they would agree that politicians should not pick their voters. Voters should pick their politicians. This is a simple principle. It's a foundational principle that forms the very foundation of trust in a democratic system. When Albertans go to the polls, they need to know that the rules were not bent in advance by the very people seeking to benefit from them. Albertans need to know that boundaries were not drawn in backrooms to protect incumbents, punish growing communities, dilute certain votes, or preserve power for a government that is afraid to run on a fair map. And that is why on this side of the House we are fighting for the soul of democracy in this province.

Madam Speaker, I represent Edmonton-South West. I'm very proud to represent this riding. It's one of the fastest growing parts of this province. If you talk to anybody in Edmonton-South West, they'll tell you. They know what growth looks like. Families see it in our schools. We experience it every day on the roads. We see it in the new and growing neighbourhoods and the new families that move in and the new communities that form and the new pressures on public services. You know, I understand very well that population growth creates real challenges for electoral boundaries, and of course, I understand that fast-growing communities need effective representation. I understand that rural communities also have unique challenges related to distance, geography, transportation, and access.

9:10

Madam Speaker, on this side of the House we're not saying that these issues don't matter or that we're disregarding rural Alberta and only focused on urban Alberta. That is absolutely not what we're saying. These are all issues that deserve serious consideration and attention. That is precisely why we have an independent boundaries commission in the first place. This process that we had can balance the competing interests to ensure that, you know, there's fairness, but what this government is doing is throwing out the process because they disliked the result. That is problematic.

If the government genuinely believed Alberta needed 91 seats, it had opportunities to address that before the commission completed its work. It could have made that decision before the process began. It could have given the commission the mandate and the time to properly consider a 91-seat map through the established process. But, Madam Speaker, that isn't what happened. Instead, the government waited until the commission reported. Then, when the result was politically inconvenient, they decided to change the rules.

Madam Speaker, Albertans are paying attention. We're fighting for the soul of democracy here today. This is not just about who's going to win the next election. We all serve on limited time here. This is about ensuring that whatever bill comes through this House, it doesn't erode trust in our democracy, it doesn't erode our institutions, it doesn't destroy our province and our country. For that reason and so many more, I cannot support this bill.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and offer some thoughts on Bill 32. Just in the spirit of radical transparency, I want to say that my comments are driven as much

by passion for the number of electoral seats that are assigned to the Legislature as they are by commitment to my duty as a member of the Official Opposition to keep speaking to this bill long enough so that we've fulfilled the two-hour obligation to trigger Government Motion 42, which when implemented will allow not more than one hour to be allotted at any stage of consideration of this bill. Just so that everybody at home is aware, I need to talk until 9:22. My friend from Edmonton-South West did more than his fair share of filling up time, so I don't have to speak as long as I had planned to, and I'm grateful for that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Schmidt: I hear my friends from across the way. Listen, you guys. I know that I'm irritating, but one of these days I won't be here and they're going to miss me when I'm gone, Madam Speaker. Not that I'd ever comment on the presence or absence of members in the Chamber, but I'm certainly seeing some glowing looks from across the way, and I appreciate that, members.

With that piece out of the way, I wanted to talk about two things in particular. I want to discuss this issue of 91 seats. Although the bill says the number of electoral ridings will be increased to 91, the intent of this bill is to assign those two additional ridings to rural areas. We've heard the Premier say that in this House. In fact, when she took issue with our position on this, she pointed to me in particular and said: well, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is originally from Hanna; what does he have against rural Alberta? So as the other member from Hanna here in the House, I'm pleased to share my thoughts on what I believe the people of Hanna would think about assigning 91 seats to the Legislature and allotting two specifically to rural Alberta.

Now, Madam Speaker, I haven't spent the length of time in the Hanna area as my colleague the Finance minister has. I only lived there for a few years when I was in high school, but I lived there long enough to know that the people of Hanna are fundamentally fair and they don't want people to wield power that isn't unearned, and that's exactly what this bill will do. This will assign disproportionate amounts of power to people in rural Alberta over the proceedings here in this Legislature because their votes will count more than the votes of the people that I now represent in Edmonton-Gold Bar. I am certain that the people of Hanna would never elect me as a New Democrat to represent them, and in fact – I can't remember what I was going to say. It doesn't matter.

I do know that the people of Hanna fundamentally believe that elections should be won and lost fairly and that the outcomes of those elections should be determined when everybody has their voice equally represented at the ballot box. By assigning two additional seats to rural Alberta, this government is skewing the elections away from fairness and into that realm of unearned power and privilege that the people of Hanna, I believe, would fundamentally reject. On that basis, I believe that the members of this Legislature should vote down this bill.

I have seven minutes left, and I promise you that I'm not the only one who's going to feel like this is an eternity, members, Madam Speaker. I'm going to make sure that all of us suffer as much as I do over the next seven minutes.

Ms Chapman: Five.

Mr. Schmidt: Oh, five. Thank you to the Member for Calgary-Beddington. Yeah.

It's interesting, Madam Speaker, that the government is choosing to increase the number of seats in the Legislature to 91. Now, of course, this is from a misinterpretation of the Electoral Boundaries Commission report.

You know, I have thought about what would happen if we radically altered the makeup of the Legislature. Instead of these incremental changes from 87 to 91 seats, what would happen if, for example, we looked at the mother Parliament, as a former Speaker was fond of saying, Westminster, and elected 668 representatives from across Alberta, what that would do to the dynamics of the Legislature? I think one of the things that we would see if we had 668 members instead of just 91 – of course, there is a cap to the number of cabinet positions that a government can hand out. I know that this government has worked very hard to raise the ceiling on the number of cabinet positions that are available to offer their members, but you know, at some point you can't continue to create ministries.

Member Eremenko: Everybody is a parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, my friend from Calgary-Currie is saying something about parliamentary secretaries. What's important for everybody to remember is that parliamentary secretaries are not automatically part of cabinet. They don't participate in those governing positions. I remember my friend Brian Mason describing parliamentary secretaries, I guess, as hood ornaments on the car of government, and I haven't seen anything from parliamentary secretaries here to dispel me of that understanding.

9:20

Mr. Nally: Ours actually work.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, I hear the Member for Morinville-St. Albert say that his actually do work. I would believe it, I guess, if I actually saw cabinet ministers doing work, but I have yet to see that from most of the cabinet ministers who are sitting across the way.

An Hon. Member: Especially when you were one.

Mr. Schmidt: Yeah. Oh, yes, I hear my friend from Grande Prairie-Wapiti talking about me being Advanced Education minister. [interjections] In fact, I'm very proud of the record that I had as Advanced Education minister. I know they're getting a little bit excited, Madam Speaker, but I will tell them that all they're doing is encouraging me to keep going. We're going to be here. I know that they tend to sleep in their chairs, so being here late doesn't really impact their sleep as much as it impacts ours, but at some point I think they'll probably want to assume a reclining position and close their eyes rather than closing their eyes in an upright position, as many of them have right now.

What was I saying, Madam Speaker? I don't remember. You know, the fun thing about speaking in the Legislature is that everything is written down in *Hansard*, so when I ask myself what the heck was it that came out of my mouth last night, tomorrow morning I'll be able to look it up on the Internet and find out and try to make any sense of this.

I think my point was to speculate on what the dynamics of the Legislature would be if we had drastically increased the number of seats from, say, 87 to 668 so that we elected as many representatives as they do in the Parliament in Westminster. I think that that would create for a much more interesting dynamic because when you have a House full of members who will never ever be able to get into cabinet, then you have a cabinet that is as afraid of its own private members as it is of other members of the Legislature.

I am getting the signal that I have fulfilled my obligations. I look forward to Government Motion 42 now that we've spent enough time on this bill to trigger that motion.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm going to speak for a short period of time on the importance of effective representation in terms of how that affects the north in particular. Obviously, since the Saskatchewan reference case it's clear that the Supreme Court of Canada, in its interpretation of section 3, requires that we continue with effective representation, which allows for variations within geography, not just one-to-one voter, for representation variations in terms of community history, in terms of diversity. I'd say that the north has got bucketsful of geography, history, and diversity to pull from for exactly why we need to consider how effective representation should at a principle be applied when it comes to the boundaries commission and the work that they do.

I can tell you from the interim report – and this is something that my colleagues and I, I think seven or eight members of the United Conservative caucus, published publicly, support to keep the northern ridings the way they were. I'll quote from what was a commission established by the NDP for the previous boundary commission, coming out of, I think, 2017-18, before the 2019 election, where they said – and I'm paraphrasing here, not quoting – that if every boundary commission were to remove one to two northern rural ridings, we would soon have no northern ridings left. This is inevitably a consequence of a sparsity of population.

However, ever since the creation of our first constituencies across this province in various forms there has always been a recognition that the far north, the Peace River constituency, is one of only two, Madam Speaker, that have not changed their name since 1905. Pop quiz for any others: I'm happy to have an intervention if anyone knows the second one. It's St. Albert, Peace River and St. Albert are the only two constituencies that consistently have held their name and more or less the same representation. Obviously, St. Albert's has diminished in geography to a degree but still centred around that wonderful community of St. Albert, and Peace River as well along the northern stretches of the Peace River.

I bring all this up only to say that from the very start there have been ridings that have disproportionately represented very large swaths of the north. Even before we had the Saskatchewan reference case from the Supreme Court, we knew that some meaningful sense of effective representation would be required. It would be required for a compensation where it couldn't be a one-to-one vote, where the rural north or at different times other rural communities across the province to be meaningfully represented in their voice in the Chamber would require consideration for geography, a consideration for diversity of population and demographics, and, of course, the history of that community.

The interesting thing about the Peace River constituency along with most of the constituencies in the north is that they don't align with our road transportation network. They don't even align in meaningful ways with – when communities came into existence, some of my most populous communities were really just intersections in the 1960s. I think of the hamlet of La Crête. In the 1950s and '60s it meaningfully wasn't an urbanized hamlet the way it is now. What really developed our communities were the rivers, and it was the river pathways with the river boats taking settlers, moving through the communities, and developing Peace River and Manning. It really was the oil fields around High Level in particular that developed that community in the '70s.

It's a unique set of different influences that have created the development in my own community, just as it has been in Lesser Slave Lake, just as it's been in Grande Prairie-Wapiti, just as it's been in the communities of Fort McMurray on the other side of the province in the northeast. These northern communities have a very

unique history, so the nature of their representation needs to take into account how that development happened, their community history, take into account the diversity that we see within the province in the north, with very diverse communities living side by side with very different populations, and then, of course, the very real consequence that our northern geography has.

Of course, effective representation is key to that, and that's why it's important to vote to move forward the work that has to happen with the Electoral Boundaries Commission and the work for the committee. I ask all members to support this legislation.

With that, I move to adjourn debate on this legislation.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 27 Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2026

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to move third reading of Bill 27, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2026.

At its core this bill is about discipline and direction, discipline in how we manage public dollars and direction in how we prepare Alberta for what comes next. Albertans expect more than good intentions when it comes to legislation; they expect results they can see and stability they can count on.

We're living through a time of uncertainty, global pressures, volatile markets, and rising costs. Families feel it at the kitchen table. Businesses feel it on their balance sheets. Government has a responsibility to respond with clarity and speed. This bill reflects that responsibility. It focuses on what we can control: how we spend, where we invest, and how we build systems that work better for people. It strengthens the foundation under Budget 2026 by turning priorities into action.

This legislation takes meaningful steps to modernize auto insurance with one clear objective, to put people first. When someone is injured in a collision, the last thing they need is delay, dispute, and uncertainty. They need care quickly and through a system they trust and understand. These changes move us toward that reality. They ensure faster access to treatment, more flexibility in care, and clearer rules so the system works as intended. The impact is straightforward, better support when it matters most.

Madam Speaker, this bill also speaks to responsibility, particularly when it comes to supporting seniors. Alberta's population is growing, and it's aging. If we act responsibly today, we protect our programs for the long term. Our legislation ensures supports remain focused on those who need them most while keeping the system strong for the years ahead. The impact is clear. Seniors who rely on these programs can continue to do so with confidence that they will be there for the long haul.

Madam Speaker, the third piece of this bill looks forward to Alberta's place in a competitive global economy. We know the reality. Investment is mobile, talent is mobile, and opportunity doesn't wait. If Alberta wants to lead, we need the right tools to compete. This legislation strengthens our ability to partner with the private sector to attract capital and to support companies that are building and scaling right here at home. It does so carefully, with strong governance, clear accountability, and decisions driven by merit. The intention is not to replace the market but to work

alongside it. The impact will be more investment staying in Alberta, more companies growing here, and more high-quality jobs for Albertans.

9:30

Madam Speaker, across all of these measures there is a common thread: focus. We're not trying to do everything, but instead we are focused on doing the right things and doing them well: protecting core services while preparing for change, supporting people while strengthening the systems around them, and managing public finances with care so that every dollar works as hard as the people who earn it. To those who contributed to this debate, I appreciate the discussion and thorough examination of this bill, but at the end of the day, the legislation stands on its own merits. It's practical, it's measured, and it's built with Albertans in mind. It's the legislation we need today to build a stronger tomorrow.

With that, I move third reading of Bill 27 and encourage all members of this Assembly to support this bill. And I request to adjourn debate.

Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

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

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think I did make a mistake. I meant to say, "including the first bill in Committee of the Whole."

The Deputy Speaker: We can vote again.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Bill 27 Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2026 (continued)

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

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to get an opportunity to speak to this bill, albeit somewhat briefly. Bill 27 is what we call an omnibus bill. It amends several acts. I can actually remember many of the members opposite being very upset when we once introduced a bill that amended two statutes at once, so I can only imagine how aggrieved they are with their own bills.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

This does a number of things, but I want to highlight two of them in particular. One of the things it does is reduce the income threshold by 9 per cent for seniors to access programs. It doesn't sound like a big deal, but what it means is that because they're decreasing the threshold, it's not that the people get 9 per cent less. It's that at the same income a bunch of new people get entirely cut off, and I think that that is incredibly troubling. It's incredibly troubling.

We are probably in the biggest affordability crisis in modern history in this province right now. Our caucus has made numerous attempts from a bill that we just introduced, that would get rid of

sort of unstated extra charges, that would ensure one-click cancellation for subscriptions so that Albertans could save money. That wasn't on. They were not into our motion to do something about shrinkflation, which is essentially that you pay the same thing for groceries that get ever smaller. This is just a different way of raising costs on Albertans. That is incredibly problematic. There has been a resistance to do anything on groceries, on insurance, on anything.

The other point that I wanted to pick up on is auto insurance. This bill is the final stage – I have spoken about this before because we seem to like to slow roll things now – of bringing in what I would call the worst-case scenario of all possible insurances. There are basically two models. There's a private insurance model where folks can sue if they are injured. The benefits of that model are that you get full compensation, so there's no cap at \$300,000 or whatever it is in the particular jurisdiction. That's really important because if you are catastrophically injured and unable to work and you need to redo your house for mobility aids and all sorts of things like that, the going rate for that is about \$2 million right now, or it was the last time I updated my insurance.

The one model is problematic in that way, but it has higher costs whereas the public insurance model would have lower costs. The UCP have somehow managed to split the difference and wound up with high costs and no right to sue, so basically it's the worst of both worlds.

Mr. Speaker, this bill, I would say, is incredibly concerning. I think it once again demonstrates a government that is just simply totally out of touch with the concerns of everyday Albertans while they are busy gerrymandering and tilting the playing field in favour of the separatists. Albertans are begging – begging – for some good governance, for a government that cares about their costs, about their wages, about the fact that when you call an ambulance it doesn't show up, about their children in overcrowded classrooms. These concerns may be every day, but they are incredibly important. They are the fabric of our life here in Alberta, and they are the concerns of the people that I represent. I think that those people deserve a government that cares about those things rather than caring about the separatist agenda.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Member Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm also pleased to rise and once again speak a little bit to Bill 27. Yeah. I'd like to reiterate some comments that I have just heard from my colleague on this bill. Albertans are thinking about affordability, Mr. Speaker, and this government appears to be thinking about anything but. On this side of the House we've brought forward proposals from housing to minimum wages to groceries to other fees that Albertans pay every day, and again and again the government has voted against everything that we brought forward to try and make life more affordable to Albertans.

Instead, as an example in this bill, the Minister of Finance has made it clear. He talked in his opening remarks about the kitchen table and the balance sheet. With this bill he's made it pretty clear he's thinking more about the corporate balance sheet than he is about the kitchen table that Albertans are sitting at, Mr. Speaker. He's made it clear that instead of lowering insurance premiums, he's been expressing his concern about insurance companies not being as profitable as they would like. We've heard him talk more about the profitability of insurance companies than he's talked

about the affordability of insurance premiums for Albertans. On this side of the House we're more concerned with the insurance premiums paid by Albertans while this government continually looks past affordability.

Mr. Speaker, before the auto insurance changes were proposed – and we're now going back a couple of years – average insurance premiums paid in Alberta were, some estimated, at \$1,800 a year. At that time, the first action of the minister to make changes to auto insurance: well, that was to announce that premiums would be rising by 7.5 per cent that year, again 7.5 per cent this year. What does that mean for the average insurance purchaser in Alberta? Well, it means that their premiums are now closer to \$2,100 a year. With so many Albertans expressing the anxiety they feel and not being able to afford food every month, \$300 more in auto insurance is significant.

Then this minister introduced his stated changes for no-fault insurance, claiming that it's based on the Manitoba auto insurance model. But there is, of course, one fundamental difference between all of the changes that are being made in Alberta today and that which we see in Manitoba. That fundamental difference is that Manitoba, along with Saskatchewan and British Columbia, are nonprofit government insurance agencies, Mr. Speaker, not private insurance as we see here in Alberta.

You see, private insurers are factoring in profits and returns to their shareholders. Government insurance factors in the premiums paid by Albertans and ensuring that Albertans are fairly compensated. Insurance companies are not in the business to deliver a public good. They are in the business to make a profit, and the legislation brought forward, including Bill 27, is advancing the profitability of insurance companies, not the affordability of Albertans.

9:40

Also, Mr. Speaker, if we talk again about those public insurance agencies in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia, there is one notable difference that we can see, that citizens and residents can see every single day. What they see is that the insurance premiums paid by auto insurers in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia are about half of the insurance premiums that are paid here in Alberta. Bill 27 isn't going to help that.

Now, for those who have already worked, I want to talk about one more thing about affordability because this bill does amend a few different pieces of legislation. In addition to speaking to auto insurance, I wanted to also speak to the changes to seniors' benefits.

As we just heard from my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View, what this bill does is it moves forward with what we saw in the budget. It changes the threshold, the income threshold, for benefits for seniors, and what we heard just described is: what it means is that in changing that threshold, thousands of Alberta seniors who were receiving benefits yesterday will not be receiving benefits tomorrow, and these are seniors who are living on relatively low fixed incomes, Mr. Speaker. We're talking about seniors who have already worked their entire lives to provide for their families, to provide for this province, and who find themselves today barely making it from one day to the next, and what does this government do? They throw thousands of them off of benefits.

Let's not forget that this government has already made moves to increase the copay of medications for seniors. They've already made moves to make lives more difficult for seniors, to make lives less affordable for seniors. Mr. Speaker, our seniors deserve to live a life of dignity and respect. That clearly is not a priority for this government.

I've said it before, and I will say it again. If the minister is looking for ways to balance the budget and close that \$9.4 billion gap, taking money from low-income seniors is not the way to do it. Responsibility is not making lives more difficult for seniors today in some hope that you'll be able to make lives, you know, maybe equally more difficult for seniors in the future. That's not the way we should be looking at it. The government should not be looking to the vulnerable to balance the books, Mr. Speaker.

Instead, the government could be looking to reclaim the \$90 million they threw away to purchase Turkish Tylenol that was never delivered. Instead, this government could be looking to clean up their procurement processes and keep hundreds of millions in the pockets of Albertans instead of putting it in the pockets of their friends, who are securing single-source private contracts. This government could be focused on delivering public education and public health care instead of their obsession with privatization of public services. That's how we could be looking at the budget, Mr. Speaker. This government could be listening to Albertans and bring forward legislation that actually makes their lives easier, not harder. This bill makes life more expensive by focusing on the profitability of insurance companies. This bill makes life more difficult for seniors living on fixed incomes, struggling to pay for medication, buy food, and pay rent.

Mr. Speaker, I might support the changes to Alberta's innovation ecosystem and the economic development proposals in this bill, but I cannot and I will not support the changes to auto insurance and seniors' benefits that make life more difficult for thousands and thousands of Albertans. I will be voting against this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:46 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	Sigurdson, R.J.
Bouchard	Long	Sinclair
Cyr	Lovely	Singh
de Jonge	Lunty	Stephan
Dreeshen	McDougall	Turton
Dyck	Nally	van Dijken
Ellis	Neudorf	Wiebe
Fir	Nicolaides	Williams
Getson	Nixon	Wilson
Glubish	Petrovic	Wright, J.
Horner	Pitt	Yao
Jean	Rowswell	Yaseen
Johnson	Sawhney	

Against the motion:

Al-Guneid	Eggen	Goehring
Arcand-Paul	Ellingson	Ip
Chapman	Elmeligi	Renaud
Deol	Ganley	Schmidt
Totals:	For – 44	Against – 12

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

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

Bill 30 Expedited 120-Day Approvals Act

The Chair: Does anybody wish to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Al-Guneid: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm happy to join the Committee of the Whole and speak on Bill 30.

I would like to reiterate my thoughts from second reading that, yes, absolutely, absolutely, and of course, we want to build big projects in Alberta. Of course, we want our regulations to be efficient and to ensure timely and reasonable project review timelines as requirements are met. There's always an opportunity for governments to re-evaluate regulations and ensure that the investors are experiencing reasonable times to process their applications.

Madam Chair, I hear this all the time from business leaders and investors saying time and time again that they want certainty, and they want to understand rules and regulations in various jurisdictions, including ours. I have to emphasize that the rules and the regulations in Alberta need to be clear and crisp with no doubt or vague way in the way they're written. The rules cannot disrespect treaty rights, cannot disrespect Indigenous consultations, and cannot ignore environmental protections. This will impact the very certainty that companies need to invest. This can lead to years in courts, and we do not want to see good projects ending up in litigation for years.

I think the minister recognizes that. I've heard him twice clarify in the House, and I do appreciate what he said. Again, I quote him here.

No project can actually be submitted in the process without completing the environmental impact assessment and the Indigenous consultation, which obviously deals with courts, and we want to make sure that process is dealt with appropriately. If it's not, the project won't go ahead.

So I agree with the minister, and I do appreciate this clarity in the House on how the environmental assessment and Indigenous consultation must be completed before applying for the 120-day review period in Bill 30.

Madam Chair, we want to reflect the energy minister's statement in his own bill. It's important to be clear with the industry to avoid confusions among industry players and legal experts around the requirements of Indigenous consultations and environmental impact assessments. The bill should not add more confusion to those working in the field, and we should not be stuck in legalese.

For that, Madam Chair, I'd like to introduce an amendment, and I have the copies for you.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A1. Hon. member, you may proceed.

Ms Al-Guneid: Madam Chair, I move that Bill 30, Expedited 120-Day Approvals Act, be amended in section 2(2) as follows:

- (a) by striking out clause (f) and substituting the following:
(f) proof acceptable to the Minister that the environmental impact assessment reports, if any, required to be prepared and

submitted under Part 2 of the *Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act* for the project have been completed.

- (b) by striking out clause (g) and substituting the following:
 (g) proof acceptable to the Minister that all required consultations with Indigenous communities respecting the project have been completed.

As I said, Madam Chair, this amendment matches what the energy minister said in the Legislature not once but twice, and I want to thank him for his clarity in the House. It helped inform this amendment I put forward. We want it to be reflected in this new law.

I want to speak for a minute on impact assessments and why they're important. Impact assessments are not just an assessment on the project's impact on the environment. This is also a socioeconomic impact assessment. Think about it, Madam Chair. When a company builds a major project, thousands of employees and contractors join the project area. They might live on company sites, they might stay on company accommodations or decide to move with their families to the nearby cities. There is an economic impact, obviously, with the influx of thousands of people, the increased economic opportunities, and the increased revenue to municipalities. An impact assessment would measure the economic benefits to help inform the municipalities and project owners and the governments.

10:00

When you have an influx of workers and their families, there is also a social impact. These people need homes, they need health care services, they need schools if their families move with them, and they need all the public services that we see in any city. So if the population increases or doubles in a short time because of the project, well, the municipalities need to prepare. They need to be ready for that increased demand. The services need to be there to absorb this population increase in a short time. That's what we call a socioeconomic impact assessment, which will help the municipalities and the provincial government to be ready for major projects. The energy minister probably knows this more than anyone as the MLA for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. I've been there many times, Madam Chair. Besides being one of the most stunning places, with the Athabasca River and the surrounding regions, Fort McMurray is an economic engine for Alberta and Canada. The growth that this municipality has faced is beyond incredible. That's why we need to prepare. We know how growth happens.

Madam Chair, in a previous life I worked for a company that had a massive LNG project. At the peak of the LNG project construction, there were 10,000 employees and contractors at the plant. Can you imagine the impact of 10,000 people coming into one municipality in just four to six months? This amendment clarifies the need for impact assessments, which not only help the project proponents understand the local impacts – the social, economic, and environmental impacts – but also it is a tool that helps governments plan for the changes that will occur in a region and its surrounding regions. It is about being prepared.

Now for the Indigenous consultations. The current section 2(2)(g) in the bill requires “proof acceptable to the Minister of the status of any planned, ongoing or completed consultations with Indigenous communities respecting the project.” This is confusing to stakeholders, Madam Chair. A planned Indigenous consultation is not a completed consultation. An intention is not a consultation. A plan of a plan is not an Indigenous consultation. I am unsure why the bill has vague language around this. We know there are no shortcuts to the duty of the Crown to consult. So what defines the proof here? I repeat my questions to the minister and the Premier.

Will a social media posting seeking consultation qualify as proof? Is sending an e-mail to Indigenous communities proof acceptable to the minister? What standard are we talking about here? Why not make this potential law as clear as the minister had said in the statement in the Legislature not once but twice? Why not spell it out? Why not spell out Alberta's duty to consult on this bill? The duty to consult is not mentioned even once in the bill. I do not see any amendments to other statutes that impact the ministries of energy, environment, or Indigenous affairs. The duty to consult is included in Canada's Constitution, under Part II of the Constitution Act, 1982. That is clear.

I believe this is a good amendment to Bill 30, that matches exactly what the energy minister told us. We support the intent of this bill to ensure projects are reviewed in a timely manner while respecting treaty rights and ensuring responsible development in Alberta. I urge all members to support it.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis on the amendment.

Dr. Elmeligi: Yes, Madam Chair, I will stick to the amendment. Thank you. Oh, it's getting late. Okay. I want to express support for this amendment because, like I said last night when we were debating this bill, this amendment does reflect an intention that the minister has previously shared, that environmental impact assessments and First Nations consultation will have been completed before a project will be allowed to enter this expedited approvals stream.

I want to really zero in on environmental impact assessments and talk a little bit about why they're important and why they need to be completed before a project can enter into the stream. Environmental impact assessments are managed under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act. They analyze potential environmental, social, and economic impacts of major projects. Environmental impact assessments are not just about the environment; they're about impacts to the community. They also provide economic projections so we can have a sense of how many jobs will be provided, for example. The whole purpose of this is that environmental impact assessments become this repository to identify risks, plan mitigations to address those risks, and strategies to determine if a project is in the public's best interests.

I think what's important for people to understand, Madam Speaker, is that there has not been an environmental impact assessment that has ever said no outright to a development. That is not the purpose of EIAs. EIAs are designed to say: yes, and. Yes, you can do this development, and here's all the things that you need to do to make sure that this development stays in the public interest, to make sure that water, land, and biodiversity are protected, to make sure that the local community's needs are addressed, and to make sure that the economic projections are in Albertans' best interest.

This is one of the reasons why the Grassy Mountain coal mine in southern Alberta is so problematic. In the environmental impact assessment it came out that the economic projections were not sufficient to warrant the scope of impact to community and environment, meaning that the project was deemed not in the public best interest. It's important for people to understand, I think, that EIAs are not just about the environment; they really do take a holistic view of the project and its impacts. They define how we reduce risks and liabilities over the long term. This is good for communities, better for the environment, and also makes sure that Albertans receive economic benefit from these major projects.

AI data centres are another good example. One of the reasons why we need to have environmental impact assessments for these things is so that we can have a better understanding of how many jobs will be created. I don't think it will surprise you, Madam Chair, to learn that AI data centres are kind of run by AI. They're not employing a whole bunch of people, so we need to understand how many jobs are created, what the economic benefit is to the local community. That comes out of an environmental impact assessment.

In this work, environmental impact assessments scope and collect baseline data. This is really important. It helps us understand what our starting point is, and their final piece is that they create a monitoring plan so that we can measure how things change over time so that we can assess if we are drifting too far from the original objectives of the plan. We need to have that baseline data.

Then an environmental impact assessment predicts what the impacts are. It does this through analysis and scientific modelling, and it proposes mitigation to address those impacts. That could be based on the literature, it could be based on consultation with communities, and it's really about reducing impact, again, to make sure that the project is overall in Albertans' best interests.

Environmental impact assessments are also the only place where cumulative effects are addressed, Madam Chair. Cumulative effects are where we actually look at that development and all of the other developments around it to assess what the overall impact of development is on the land, the water, the communities, and the economy. Environmental impact assessments also define emergency plans in the case of extreme weather or accidents on site.

The reason why I'm going through all of this detail, Madam Chair, is that depending on the scope and the complexity of the project, an environmental impact assessment can take different lengths of time to complete. It could take a few months, it could take more than a year, so this is why we have to make sure that these assessments are completed before the project enters the streamlined 120-day approval process, because completing an environmental impact assessment can take more than 120 days. It's really important that that clarity is provided for industry to have predictability and understanding of what needs to be done before a project can enter the 120-day approval process.

Environmental impact assessments are about evidence-based and informed decision-making. They are a good thing. Sometimes the government acts as if environmental impact assessments are a barrier to development. They are not. They are just a way for us to have all of the information so that we can make decisions that are in Albertans' best interest. They allow for public input. They're about long-term planning and decreasing environmental impact.

10:10

Similarly, First Nations consultation is about honouring a relationship that people have with the land and with community. Doing a thorough job with Indigenous consultation protects us from future lawsuits and projects getting held up from legal challenges.

If anybody in this House has seen the documentary *Yintah* on Netflix – it's about the Wet'suwet'en people and the pipeline – you can understand how legal challenges from First Nations can hold a project up for years. Years. We're not talking about 120 days. If that First Nations consultation and engagement is not completed to a satisfactory level of the First Nation and they take legal action, it can slow projects down a lot, so making sure that we have a guarantee that First Nations consultation and engagement will be completed before a project enters a 120-day approval is critical for the success of this bill.

Without these assurances a project could enter the 120-day approval process based on, I don't know, the discretion of the

minister, I guess, and then could be kicked out of the process, could be kicked out of the 120-day approval because the work is not done in advance, or it goes through that and then ends up wrapped up in the courts. That is a risk that this bill is being designed to avoid, so we need to make sure that the language in the bill is proactive and assures that those risks are mitigated by completing the homework before the projects enter this process.

That is the critical part of this amendment. The amendment reflects stuff the minister has already said in the House multiple times, and so I think all members should vote in support of this amendment.

The Chair: Any other members on the amendment? Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A1 as moved by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: Any members on the main bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would also like to move an amendment.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A2. You may proceed.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Madam Chair. Would you like me to read it out?

The Chair: You can if you like.

Member Arcand-Paul: I'll leave it to the record. The rationale behind this amendment is linked in further to the comments from the minister yesterday and the fact that we just did not pass this amendment put forward by my wonderful friend from Calgary-Glenmore.

It was the minister yesterday who argued that Alberta has the best Indigenous consultation process in Canada, and I do believe he said the world. The UCP has created legislation that would impair Indigenous rights included in this language of this amendment, and I would suggest to the other side that this amendment is, in fact, a friendly one given the minister's comments that we do have the best Indigenous consultation in Canada and in the world. If the UCP is satisfied with its record on consultation, it should have no issue with including this addition of 7.1 after section 7 to respect as a non-derogation and non-abrogation clause for this 120-day approval process.

The current drafting of Bill 30, in particular 2(2)(g), opens the door pretty wide with respect to the duty to consult and this government's responsibilities thereunder. That section is so broad and gives the minister broad power to determine whether consultation has been affected. In fact, the language in the section where "proof acceptable to the Minister of the status of any planned [or] ongoing . . . consultations with Indigenous communities," does raise some concerns as brought up by my friend from Calgary-Glenmore. From the minister's comments the other day on this bill the standard will be the status quo, again, because this minister has alleged that Alberta has the best Indigenous consultation process and, I'm paraphrasing here, that it's super duper.

Madam Chair, there are numerous examples, and I'll be very careful here as there are active pieces of litigation, to my knowledge, related to this government's failures in consultation, which in itself demonstrates that we may not actually have good consultation records and this amendment is necessary, today, for us to pass.

For example, there's the application related to the cumulative effects with Duncan's First Nation against the province of Alberta, the litigation related to changes of the Water Act that we just recently had debate on here in this Chamber, or the Mikisew Cree First Nation's application filed earlier this week in Federal Court related to the co-operation agreement with the federal agreement. For those watching at home, that is the agreement where this government, among other things, is given the responsibility to discharge impact assessments in Alberta, including Indigenous consultation and accommodation for projects in Alberta.

Madam Chair, I'm going to table this tomorrow along with the other several things that I'm referencing tonight. The Federal Court action by Mikisew alleges that

the *Expedited 120-Day Approvals Act*, which eliminates all meaningful consultation on projects they deem to qualify. The passage of Bill 30 vitiates any appearance of competence in regulatory processes that supported the Cooperative Agreement. Bill 30 removes the . . . Alberta [Indigenous consultation] Regime that formed the already faulty precondition for the Cooperative Agreement. Canada has failed to respond to this material change.

It appears this government has put the cart before the horse, and of course the minister of energy misspoke on the UCP's record of consultation.

Looking at the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation's submission to the federal Impact Assessment Agency's public submission process related to the co-operation agreement, they've outlined that

Alberta's regulatory system has failed the Nation and other Indigenous peoples throughout the province. A "one project, one review" approach to impact assessment that places greater reliance on this fundamentally flawed system will be at the expense of ACFN's rights, future, and well-being as an Indigenous people.

In this context, Canada's reliance on Alberta's consultation and regulatory processes would be undertaken with clear notice of their alleged consultation deficiencies, heightening the risk of unlawful delegation and unreasonable decision-making.

I don't have to highlight any further, but there are also other Indigenous nations, including the Métis. The Fort Chipewyan Métis Association also submitted that "Canada cannot rely on Alberta to discharge its constitutional obligations" because Alberta's consultation processes are lacklustre. The Otipemisiwak Métis Government district council of Fort McMurray Métis district have issued concerns with Indigenous consultation by this province and the disregard for what my friends the members from Calgary-Glenmore and Banff-Kananaskis have raised about impact assessments, that they are insufficient, and this bill further erodes what little confidence it has in the regulator.

The Montana First Nation put it pretty well in their submissions as well, that

our Nation has no confidence that the Province of Alberta and its compromised regulatory regime will properly assess environmental harms or protect the rights of Indigenous peoples. The [Aboriginal] Consultation Office operates under outdated policies that fail to reflect Indigenous values, treaty obligations, or Nation-to-Nation protocols. Many Nations have expressed their frustrations with the ACO and have advocated for fundamental changes to Alberta's Guidelines on Consultation with First Nations.

What we're hearing loud and clear is that Canada cannot rely on Alberta to discharge its constitutional obligations; moreover, that Alberta's consultation with Indigenous peoples is very bad. This is further supported by the whereas clause in the draft co-operation agreement that Canada maintains their commitment to UNDRIP, and Alberta law views UNDRIP as nonbinding.

This amendment is necessary to ensure that these expedited 120-day approvals meet their legal responsibilities to truly provide assurance to not only Indigenous peoples but proponents that my friend from the Member for Banff-Kananaskis raised. This expedited process will not be slowed down by litigation if we actually include this amendment. If we don't, it will. We've seen this. We're seeing it right now with this co-operation agreement. It should be a win for this government to adopt this amendment given they already believe their consultation record is much better than anywhere in this country.

Don't take it from me, Madam Chair. The Otipemisiwak Métis Government district council for Fort McMurray Métis district did put it pretty aptly in their submissions about the co-operation agreement that

it is totally inadequate for Canada to hand over jurisdiction and authority for these matters on Alberta's word and without meaningful oversight and accountability. To do so will not provide regulatory certainty for investment in the province; rather, it may initiate greater regulatory and legal uncertainty and potentially bog major projects down in the courts for years if not decades as a result of Alberta's inadequate regulatory and Crown consultation regimes.

Madam Chair, that is something that should cause alarm for all of us in this place. We want investment to move forward. First Nations and Métis communities want investment to move forward. But consultation is not just a box-ticking exercise. It's not just a rubber-stamping exercise. It should be meaningful. It should include the perspectives of Indigenous peoples in a really robust way. That's all they're asking for.

10:20

I know many members across the way represent many First Nations and Métis communities. They're not asking for the whole world. They want to be participants in the economic prosperity of this place. They've been living on these lands, impoverished from our resources being taken away without proper consultation and without proper recompensation. So why would we not have this good amendment that will ensure that we do this work under this bill? The way it's presently drafted, it doesn't include fulsome, robust consultation. With the co-operation agreement, well, we're just left to wonder: what's going to happen? First Nations and Métis nations are raising the alarm.

Finally, Madam Chair, the minister heckled the other day to give one good example where Alberta is being beat in Indigenous consultation. Well, one need only look at the good old NDP-led province of Manitoba, where Premier Wab Kinew has announced the Manitoba Crown-Indigenous Corporation. [interjections] I love that the member opposite just laughed.

They could never meet the same kinds of consultation that a good old First Nation Premier, Premier Wab Kinew, who has created a juxtaposition with the Manitoba Crown-Indigenous Corporation – to juxtapose what is happening here in Alberta. This will, in effect, include Indigenous peoples along with the Crown to make joint decisions for projects of provincial and of national importance while including the major projects office to the MCIC. This juxtaposition to the Minister of Indigenous Relations's comments that, quote, the real work of engaging with the First Nations along the pipeline's route will start in earnest after the applications are submitted to the federal government's major projects office in May. End quote. We all know where this is going. We all know with the litigation presently in front of the courts that it's not going to go further than where it's going to stall. We want our province to move forward. We want these pipelines to get through. We want oil to be moved through because it is an important industry for a big part of our province's economy.

The minister of energy was wrong, Madam Chair. Alberta is not anywhere near the best. If it were, the province would not be facing court case after court case after court case for its abysmal record, and we would not be hearing or seeing from the First Nations or the Métis communities who are raising the alarm bells. This government should have had the forethought to include this amendment before introducing this piece of legislation. I've said it before and I'll say it again until I'm blue in the face. This government does not do good consultation. The First Nations and Métis communities continue to be an afterthought, which is why this amendment is absolutely necessary.

I've said in this Chamber before that First Nations and Métis have had to develop many creative ways over the years to operate the legislative frameworks between the federal and provincial governments. One level of government blames the other for its problems while the other blames it right back, and the only people that suffer from this jurisdictional hot potato are First Nations. This amendment ensures that we provide that clarity, ensures that we provide that assurance that the treaty and Métis rights will be honoured and that the honour of the Crown here today will be respected in these 120-day approvals. The minister's making the decision on planned consultation is insufficient, Madam Chair.

With this expedited process, this jurisdictional shuffle in addition to the concerns raised by the First Nations and Métis communities mean that this amendment is absolutely necessary. I urge all members in this Chamber to vote for it because we need to do better consultation in this process. The ACO is not enough, and we must do better.

Thank you, Madam Chair. I urge everyone to vote for this amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy and Minerals.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to get up and talk to this amendment. I appreciated the member talking about putting the cart before the horse. In this particular case a lot of people misunderstand Indigenous consultation. The proper way to do it has been set out by the Supreme Court, who, honestly, directs that consultation with First Nations is never really complete. It's something that's alive and continues on right through the process, even afterwards. The members well know that many of the consultations that are done by the private sector are actually not completed and can't be completed because many of the aspects of those consultations and benefits agreements continue on well after the consultation process is in all intents and purposes laid out before the Crown in right of Alberta.

That's how we operationalize this act, Madam Chair. We put some flexibility in it. I think that the regulations, when cabinet prepares them, will, to be honest, conform with the spirit of the amendments from those two members in particular. They know, clearly, that consultation is hardly ever complete, if done properly, until well after the process is done. In this case, with most of the resources, developments will continue for many, many years if not decades because of the nature of Indigenous consultations that was put forward by the Supreme Court of Canada.

We wrote the law that way, and it is written intentionally. It must consider, as said, "the status of any planned, ongoing or completed consultations with Indigenous communities respecting the project." The reason why it's written that way, Madam Chair, is to make sure that if it's not completed, we avoid exactly what the members have been talking about, and that's litigation. We don't want to see litigation because we, on one side, expect it to be done, but on another side we know that it has to be continued on well past the original application into the project itself. The status of any

planned, ongoing, or completed consultation is there intentionally, and even the best done consultations have an element of ongoing work that we think is absolutely essential and necessary to make sure that full and fulsome consultation is done in the proper way.

We don't intend to allow any project that is not substantively concluded to be allowed in the door to get any special privileges. In fact, what we're hoping, Madam Chair, is to be able to speak to the proponent after they believe that it's fully done and get the job done. I would just say as well that if the project involves reserve land, it is governed by federal law and is not governed by Bill 30. Period. Full stop. It's governed by federal law and is not applicable, so the second amendment by the particular member, although the spirit of it is quite good, cannot be accepted because it's trite law. As a lawyer he knows that. He knows that if it's covered by the Constitution, it's covered by the Constitution. That's the highest law in the land.

With that, we would not consider supporting either amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members to the amendment?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: Any members wishing to speak? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Oh, sorry. Got up a little early.

The Chair: You don't want to speak?

The hon. Minister of Energy and Minerals.

Mr. Jean: Everybody wants to speak on this bill, Madam Chair. It's just such an excellent bill.

Mr. Schow: No, you can't speak. You just finished speaking.

Mr. Jean: I did just finish speaking, but . . .

The Chair: And you rose.

You can speak.

Are there any members that want to speak to the main bill in Committee of the Whole?

Seeing none. Okay. We're going to call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 30 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report Bill 30.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 30. I wish to table copies of all

amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

10:30

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

Government Bills and Orders
Third Reading
(continued)

Bill 30
Expedited 120-Day Approvals Act

Mr. Jean: Madam Speaker, I have to tell you that there were a lot of straws being drawn. Everybody wanted to speak to this bill because it's such an important bill. Some people think it's probably the most important bill that we've moved during this session. It's certainly an honour to rise today to move third reading of Bill 30, the Expedited 120-Day Approvals Act.

Now, Madam Speaker, sometimes people talk about things and sometimes people do things. The truth is that it's an expedited act on how to move things quicker. As an example, I want to move quicker right now because we have a whole bunch of projects in Alberta waiting to go and they need help. How do they get that help? They see a government that actually is going to follow words with action.

I'm pleased to move third reading of Bill 30, the Expedited 120-Day Approvals Act, because, Madam Speaker, this act is going to mean great things for Canada and Alberta in particular. Congratulations to our Premier for moving forward with this great act and supporting it. It really matters to people.

Thank you.

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

Ms Al-Guneid: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm joining to offer closing thoughts on Bill 30. I have to say that it is disappointing to see the minister rejecting the amendments. It's truly his own words reflected in the amendments. We did respect that ambition and reflected that in the amendments. It was a bizarre excuse. Of course, we can have a standard for Indigenous consultations and environmental impact assessments, and we can also continue consultations and building relationships with Indigenous communities. It's not mutually exclusive here. It's such a bizarre, white-and-black definition here.

It is truly disappointing. I do think that the minister's own statement in the Legislature was clear and would avoid confusion and ambiguity in his own bill. He told us that no project can actually be submitted in a process without completing the environmental impact assessment and the Indigenous consultations, which obviously deal with courts. My colleagues here from Banff-Kananaskis and Edmonton-West Henday: both of them have spoken at length how this could delay projects, the very projects that the minister wants to and we want to move ahead. The minister had the opportunity to provide crisp and clear language in his own bill to inform investors and companies of these new rules, yet: not just for the sake of no.

It's still unclear, Madam Speaker, what this bill does. The minister is creating a review committee, another committee in his bureaucracy, to review projects for him. It doesn't provide clarity

or change statutes anywhere else. We certainly do not want to see good projects being stuck in the courts because the government did not provide clear regulations for project proponents.

The closure of the Strait of Hormuz has shaken the global economy. We have seen a shock in the system and oil prices moving by as much as \$25 in a day. This turbulence in oil prices and across the value chain will continue for a while, and we haven't seen the worst of this energy shortage yet. We're seeing global energy shortages and jet fuel shortages. Alberta families are feeling the impact right here at the pump in one of the worst affordability crises we've ever seen.

Yes, oil and gas aren't the only two commodities now missing from world markets, Madam Speaker. It is also trust and predictability that we can deliver on. That's where Canada comes in, and that's where Alberta comes in as Canada's energy capital and Canada's oil and gas capital. Alberta is the capital of all types of energy. We can have it all. We don't need to limit ourselves. We have an embarrassment of resources.

I'd like to also reiterate that while the majority of the conversation around Bill 30 speaks to projects and impacts in the oil and gas industry, the legislation could equally apply to other industries: mining, utilities, forestry, anything, really, from what we can see here in this bill. But I haven't seen the minister say a word on how the bill applies to renewable energy projects. It is Canadian energy, and Alberta has some of the best potential for solar and wind in the country, Madam Speaker, and we haven't really seen any renewable projects built since the ridiculous UCP moratorium on renewables in 2023. Deals from Amazon, Telus, Starbucks, Maple Leaf Foods, Loblaws, RBC, stopped happening in Alberta. It is a shame. Renewable energy corporate deals have dropped by 99 per cent as of 2025 due to all the UCP targeted policies and piling on of red tape.

How does this bill apply to expedite renewable energy projects or remove barriers or evaluate them in a timely manner while respecting impact assessments and Indigenous consultations? Can the minister confirm whether he believes that renewable energy projects are major projects? The renewable sectors brought in \$6 billion worth of investments, Madam Speaker, and the UCP government has put the whole sector to a halt since 2023. We've never seen this done in any other sector in Alberta. How will this bill now bring a whole sector back from the dead through Bill 30?

I have to say, Madam Speaker, that the biggest challenge for major projects at the moment is the separatism fears in Alberta. That's what's stalling major projects in Alberta. The Calgary Chamber of commerce has said that separatist sentiment is hurting investments in Alberta. The ATCO CEO, Nancy Southern, has said that separatism was stalling a major hydrogen project with Asian partners. She has continued to talk to shareholders about how separatism is bad for Alberta. The Tourism Industry Association of Alberta has also said that separatism is hurting the industry. They said that \$271 million of investments have been stalled due to Alberta's separatism.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Alberta's separatism needs to come off the table, Mr. Speaker, not only to provide investment certainty and expedite major projects in Alberta but to protect our province and our country. We have a duty. We have a responsibility as elected officials right here at the Alberta Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I do appreciate the intent of Bill 30 to streamline project reviews. For that reason we do support the bill, but it's unclear what it does. We understand the minister will create another review committee in the bureaucracy that will review in no

more than 120 business days – let’s be clear – which is 5 to 6 months. The 120-day period is not an automatic yes due to the requirements of Indigenous consultations and environmental impact assessments, the minister said in the House, but for some reason he rejected the amendments that capture what he said in the House twice.

We do not see any changes to existing statutes or other laws in other ministries, so what is new here? It is forming a committee. The minister can form a review committee without creating a bill, Mr. Speaker. Expediting approvals is one thing. Cutting corners that could lead to delays and year-long court challenges is another.

While we support Bill 30, Mr. Speaker, the UCP must ensure corners are not cut that could cost companies and our province down the line. We want to build major projects in Alberta. This

needs to happen, and the way you do this, again, is by rolling up your sleeves and doing the hard work, not shortcuts.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any more speakers?

Okay. Close debate?

An Hon. Member: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 30 read a third time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly be adjourned until tomorrow at 10:00 a.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:40 p.m.]

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