



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, May 12, 2026

Day 57

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

Second Session

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

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Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
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Boitchenko, Hon. Andrew, ECA, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Brar, Gurtej Singh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
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Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),
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Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 48

New Democrat: 38

Progressive Tory: 1

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| Andrew Boitchenko | Minister of Tourism and Sport |
| Devin Dreeshen | Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors |
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| R.J. Sigurdson | Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation |
| Searle Turton | Minister of Children and Family Services |
| Dan Williams | Minister of Municipal Affairs |
| Rick Wilson | Minister of Mental Health and Addiction |
| Muhammad Yaseen | Associate Minister of Multiculturalism |

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| Shane Getson | Parliamentary Secretary for Economic Corridor Development |
| Chelsae Petrovic | Parliamentary Secretary for Health Workforce Engagement |
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| Justin Wright | Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health (South) |
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Deputy Chair: Mrs. Johnson
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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 12, 2026

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, it is my pleasure to welcome to the Legislative Assembly a distinguished delegation of U.S. state legislators seated in the Speaker's gallery. They are here as a result of Alberta's membership in a transboundary organization known as the Council of State Governments Midwest. Our visitors arrived yesterday and are meeting throughout today and tomorrow with key stakeholders and learning about Alberta. I am delighted to introduce them now and ask that they stand as I name everyone.

From Wisconsin, state Representative David Armstrong; from Indiana, state Representative Carolyn Jackson; also from Indiana but who's arriving today and, therefore, unable to join us quite yet, state Senator Eric Koch; from Nebraska, state senators Dan Lonowski and Terrell McKinney; from North Dakota, state Senator Larry Luick; from Illinois, state Representative Joyce Mason; from Ohio, state Representative Elgin Rogers Jr. accompanied by Council of State Governments Midwest staff member Jon Davis. I ask the Assembly to please give our distinguished visitors a warm welcome.

Introduction of Guests

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

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm most happy to stand and introduce to you and through you to the whole Assembly the students and staff of Gateway Christian school, who've come to join us today. Please rise and accept the warm reception of this House.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm excited to introduce a group of students that are full of beans. I mean cheese. I mean pride. They are the pride of Westglen elementary. Colleagues, please blow the roof off this place for the grade 6 students from Westglen.

The Speaker: It's my pleasure to welcome members of the Somali Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Ismael Gooni and Faisal Jama are visiting our province to explore business opportunity for Somalia's growing business community. Please rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

It's my pleasure to welcome to the House my constituency manager for Calgary-Hays, Kathy Holdaway, and her granddaughter Eden Burkitt. Eden is currently graduating ninth grade and has just

completed her final year of Pathfinders through Girl Guides. She has also spent the last five years volunteering as a junior leader for Embers. I'm immensely proud of this young woman and look forward to all she will accomplish as she starts high school. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you another visitor from Africa, Dr. Samuel Wanendeya Watulatsu, who founded the Foundation for Development of Needy Communities. With him is his brother Samson Watulatsu and Dr. Austin Mardan, respected author, researcher, and academic. I ask that they all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you my friend and special adviser external from the Calgary Zoo, Len Wolstenholme. He is joined by the incredible and hard-working team, including Dr. Kyle Burks, Steven Ross, Kathryn Gibson, and Brittney Wynnyk. I ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce Arnold Rumbold and his son Dave, both constituents of Edmonton-Whitemud. Arnold was a master electrician and, together with his late wife, Grace, has been a champion of postsecondary trades education, especially at NAIT, as well as a supporter of many cultural and community organizations across Edmonton. He's a philanthropist and a leader, and we're so thrilled to have him here. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Jaspreet Saggu. Jaspreet is the president of Seva. It's a foundation meaning service in humankind. He and his team help out the community. He's helped us a lot on the India file. I also would like to introduce Bin Lau, who's out in our office in Chicago. He's helping us guide the folks from the States. Please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Wright: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you six hard-working United Conservative interns as well as their co-ordinators who are here today to tour the Legislature. I ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation.

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you guests in the gallery today from the Central Alberta Forage and Livestock Association and the Agricultural Research and Extension Council of Alberta. These organizations do tremendous work in supporting Alberta agriculture. I look forward to meeting with them later today. I would ask that they all please rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's such an honour today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Andrew Knack, mayor of Edmonton. It has been great collaborating with Mayor Knack and his team to advance the Alberta recovery model as we work toward improving community vibrancy while helping those in need. I ask that Mayor Knack and his chief of staff, Blake Desjarlais, please rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Calgary-East.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you Jaskaran Gill and Jashan Gill from Public Autobody in Edmonton. The organization is known for quality auto service but also for a strong commitment to the community. I ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you a long-time resident of Grande Prairie, Hugh Fletcher. He's a big supporter of our Premier. He's been heavily involved in the energy sector. He's doing great work up in Grande Prairie, and that great work deserves recognition. I would ask him to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce Saffal Sher, a local Punjabi artist known for his singing, songwriting, and acting. From a very young age he has grown his presence across Canada and continues to inspire through his creativity and dedication to Punjabi culture and the arts. I ask that Saffal rise to receive the traditional and warm welcome of the Assembly.

Dr. Metz: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Dyal Singh Johal, who is gold medalist and national champion at the U19 2026 Canadian Wrestling Championships from Calgary's ROC Wrestling Club. He's demonstrated excellence and dedication and talent at the highest junior level in Canada. I ask that you rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Nurses Week

Member Batten: Happy Nurses Week to my fellow nurses. The work is hard, the hours are long, and the sacrifices are real. Often your compassion, your advocacy, and your care happens without recognition, but it still matters. Patients remember who sat and listened with them, who fought for them, who comforted them, and who cared for them when they most needed it. Thank you for everything you do.

Now, instead of supporting you, the UCP government is forcing through another attack on public health care. Bill 29 doesn't help nurses care for Albertans. It actually does the opposite. Instead of helping patients get access to public health care quickly, instead of investing in reducing wait times and increasing staff, this UCP legislation pushes Alberta further down the road to privatization and away from access for all.

On this side of the House we care deeply about Albertans and we want to improve their lives. We brought forward whistle-blower protections for health care workers, real accessibility measures for Albertans, transparent reporting from emergency rooms, affordability measures, and just yesterday fraud protection for Albertans. Every solution was provided forward to this government in service to

Albertans, and every single one of them was voted down by this UCP government.

For Nurses Week the UCP should give nurses the change they deserve. They should just call the election and stop messing with public health care.

The Speaker: Cypress-Medicine Hat.

1:40

Trade with the U.S. Midwest

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At a time when global uncertainty continues to shape our economic and geopolitical realities, the strength of our regional partnerships has never been more important. The United States is by far Alberta's most important trading partner, and the Midwest plays a key role in that relationship.

Over half of Alberta's exports to the U.S. are destined for the Midwest. Overall trade between Alberta and Midwest states accounts for \$70 billion of the \$127 billion in annual Alberta-U.S. trade. Alberta supplies roughly 60 per cent of every barrel of oil imported to the United States. In Robinson, Illinois, the Marathon petroleum refinery processes nearly 100 per cent Alberta crude.

Alberta has taken a proactive approach to strengthening our trade relationship with the U.S. On both sides of the border we are sharing a deep connection that has been driven into our history of co-operation, integrated supply chain, and shared economic interests. These ties continue to prosper across our region. They develop long-term supports in attracting investment.

That's why Alberta is proud to be a member of the Council of State Governments Midwest. We are proud to be a responsible and reliable supplier of energy, agriculture, and forestry products that help power homes, support manufacturing, and strengthen food security across the Midwest. At the same time Alberta benefits from innovation, manufacturing capacity, and market access to the Midwest states.

As we look ahead, there is tremendous opportunity to deepen this relationship even further. Strengthening North American energy security, expanding trade in emerging sectors, and ensuring resiliency in supply chains are all areas where Alberta and the Midwest can continue to lead together. Alberta's prosperity is closely tied to the success of our American partners. As America celebrates 250 years of freedom and prosperity, Alberta looks forward to strengthening this partnership over the next 250 years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Foreign Interference in Provincial Referendums

Member Arcand-Paul: Mr. Speaker, last week a public report came out about foreign interference in our province. Also, last week the minister of public safety alluded to a private report he received from the RCMP where he claimed that they found no foreign interference in Alberta's separatist movement, despite the RCMP not issuing any public report and without any evidence of those remarks tabled by that minister.

Here's the problem. Organizations including DisinfoWatch and the Global Centre for Democratic Resilience have demonstrated and warned that as the separatist debate heats up, Albertans are at risk of disinformation and influence from foreign actors from Russia, the U.S.A., and others, including economic actors.

Just this past weekend one of those economic actors issued a poll spreading misinformation, a departure from their usual QE II highway billboards. I'm talking about Rebel News, who, without sharing an actual poll, claimed that 46 per cent of First Nations support separation. I laugh because I've yet to find a separatist First

Nations person, and I talk to Indigenous peoples every day. In incoherent Facebook ramblings Ezra Levant called our democratically elected chiefs activists. Hmm. Sounds like the things said by the UCP about our courts, doctors, scientists, environmental groups, or grandmothers, to name a few.

This debate on separatism is one between Albertans. Wherever you land on that spectrum, it is your right to hold that view. But interference in this debate by foreign or economic actors hurts this debate. First Nations have been fighting a battle against a well-funded campaign by these foreign and economic actors and have raised the alarm months ago.

To quote Chief Allan Adam: while Ottawa sleeps, Alberta's first inhabitants are doing everything we can to save Confederation. End quote. It is time for the UCP to finally stand up for our Confederation or, at the very least, to protect our democracy.

The Speaker: Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Economic Corridor Development

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It should be no surprise to anyone in here that I have some pretty big ideas for our province, for northwest Canada. Thanks to the Premier, the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors, and the minister of energy I've had the opportunity to share this message not only here but in the United States, Iceland, India, and Germany. The opposition, however, doesn't get it. They've called me a separatist, amongst other things, so to them: DILLIGAF.

Mr. Speaker, let me set the record straight. I'm an expansionist. Here's what I'd like to see happen in the near future. The border between us and the territories gets awfully blurred. Alberta and Saskatchewan get access to the Arctic Ocean. I want to build fully developed economic corridors anchored by rail connecting all of the western provinces, territories, and Alaska, corridors that link the Arctic, Pacific, and the Hudson Bay. Along these corridors: pipelines, preapproved industrial zones, and foreign trade zones, tariff-free areas that attract investment and support manufacturing.

I envision a future where we do more than just export raw commodities. I see modules. I see railcars. I see shipbuilding taking place here on the prairies and shipped out to the coast to be stitched together. I see trading partners investing here not just for spot pricing or purchases; I see them helping us build the infrastructure we need for long-term security for food, energy, and technology. With all of this, we'd reach our full potential, collaborating, developing resources responsibly, becoming destinations for investment partnership for years to come.

Mr. Speaker, it's more than about infrastructure, though; it's about a mindset. For too long we've thought like a colony instead of a country here. In 1776 13 colonies chose to stand together, chart their own coasts, and become strong and free. In 1982 Canada completed its constitutional independence. Well, sort of. I believe that we carry a colonial mindset here, and that's why people in Alberta and Saskatchewan are feeling so frustrated. We don't want to be limited by that way of thinking anymore. We want Canada to be strong, to live up to the strong and free promise. If we take bold steps, if we build strength and expand, that would be the future that we should all be fighting for. That's the Canada we want.

Alberta Disability Assistance Program

Ms Renaud: Eighty thousand AISH recipients will be transferred to ADAP without any clarifying regulations about what will happen with the AISH dismantling, and people are frightened. Councils and mayors from Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge, Red Deer, Camrose,

Airdrie, Rocky Mountain House, and Claresholm have all urged this UCP government to immediately pause ADAP and measure the impact of the changes on municipal services.

Darryl Learie, an AISH recipient who is responsible for collecting almost 6,000 signatures asking the UCP to stop the ADAP transition, wrote an essay that he sent to all of us talking about what that transition means to him, and I'm going to share a few excerpts from his essay. I urge all members to read it in full.

At 52 years of age, I'm not as resilient as I was in my 20's and 30's. I am haunted by many real fears such as my health, homelessness, and losing family and friends who are essential to my well-being. These fears are the result of too many family and friends who have . . . passed away which reflects an essential support system that has significantly declined.

Darryl went on to say,

Before I [got onto] AISH I tried [seeking] employment through several employment programs, and personal effort. The longest I could maintain a job was two weeks before I succumbed to despair, helplessness, and depression . . . My depression is ongoing and episodic. In the past it has led to five suicide attempts [and a few resulting] in hospitalization.

Since the 1980s, Mr. Speaker, AISH has afforded severely disabled Albertans rights-based income security. That means they didn't have to worry, and that will end July 1. I urge this government to listen to the governments of Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge, Red Deer, Camrose, Rocky Mountain House, Claresholm. Listen to them before more people are hurt and municipal services that are already stretched to the limit start to collapse.

Thank you.

Bill 25

Ms Wright: Years ago I taught a lesson called "the torn heart." I used it when students needed a reminder that words and actions can be harmful and that damage has consequences. Every child made a red paper heart out of a piece of construction paper. As I told a story about a child just like them and about what he heard and experienced every day, each cruel word and act of disrespect meant tearing out a piece of that heart. In the end they were all torn apart, scattered over all their desks. They tried to mend them with tape, but the hearts weren't the same. The damage remained.

Mr. Speaker, my teacher heart is torn. Seven years of UCP decisions have taken their toll: chronic underfunding, deep cuts to supports, layoffs, rising school fees, barriers for the most vulnerable, misguided formulas, rushed curriculum, two strikes, and the stripping of teachers' rights. Now there's Bill 25, a grab bag of a bill that does not solve real problems or reduce class size or complexity, does not fix retention, and does not support the students who need help the most. Instead, it removes welcoming language, polices symbols, risks bothsidesism, and gives more control to the minister. It questions teachers' professionalism, ignores their expertise, limits autonomy, and sends a clear message: you are not trusted.

1:50

Mr. Speaker, this bill does not heal. It does not restore stability or trust. It does not repair the years of damage done by the UCP's choices. Teachers will keep trying to mend all those torn hearts – that is what they do – but repair also requires respect, and that's a piece this government has failed to provide. Alberta's students and the teachers who stand with them deserve better. They deserve a government that can mend what the UCP has torn apart.

Oral Question Period

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

Provincial Response to Electoral List Disclosure

Mr. Nenshi: “Nothing out of the ordinary. Nothing out of the ordinary.” That’s what the Premier said when she was asked about the largest data breach in Alberta’s history. She wants Albertans to believe that not just one but now we know multiple of her senior staffers thought that exposing her old political rival and enemy to violence was just ordinary. What kind of a culture has the Premier built in her government where this kind of immoral, unethical behaviour is just ordinary?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, there was nothing on that call to indicate that the list was illegal. In fact, what we’ve heard from some of the reporting is that the only way to discover that the list was illegal was through Elections Alberta. Elections Alberta had a young person go through and look at the 2,600 names that had been salted on the list, found a cross-reference of 87, matched that to the Republican Party, and that’s the reason for the investigations. That work could only have been done by Elections Alberta. They’re the only ones who actually have access to that list and those names. We’re pleased they’re doing that work, and we’re looking forward to seeing the outcome.

Mr. Nenshi: Nothing out of the ordinary. Not illegal, not immoral, not dangerous; just nothing out of the ordinary. Yet this Legislature has not even been able to ask the Chief Electoral Officer the critical questions Albertans need answers to. The Premier said in this House that members could get those questions answered at a meeting yesterday, but they were forbidden to ask the questions. Now, I’m not asking about committee work. I’m asking: why did the Premier say that the Chief Electoral Officer would answer these questions when members weren’t even allowed to ask them?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m not the chair of that independent committee, but what I can tell you is that it would be really out of the ordinary to be asking detailed questions about an investigation as it’s ongoing. I think we all want to see justice served. We all want to make sure that those who are responsible are held accountable, and we certainly do not want to see politicians perceived to be interfering in the process, which would derail the investigation. We want to make sure they get to the bottom of it. Let’s let them do the work. If there’s time afterwards for us to revisit the legislation, we will absolutely be looking forward to seeing what recommendations there are, and we’ll be considering them.

Mr. Nenshi: This Premier wants us to believe that asking for accountability is out of the ordinary but that deeply unethical and immoral behaviour is ordinary for her government. The Premier wants us to believe that preventing Albertans from getting access to questions is ordinary for this government. The Premier wants us to believe that attacking political opponents instead of governing is ordinary for this government. Why is such bad behaviour, putting millions of Albertans at risk and ducking accountability, ordinary for this government?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, there is a privacy investigation. There is also an RCMP investigation. There is an Elections Alberta investigation.

Some 600 cease-and-desist orders have already been issued. There have been court processes. We need to let these processes play out. There is accountability at the end of it, and we’ll be looking forward to seeing what the recommendations are from the Chief Electoral Officer about ways in which the process can be improved, but that work has to take place after the investigations are over so as not to interfere with the outcome. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The second set of questions belongs to the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Nenshi: Those investigations only started because we called the cops. If this government had its way – they thought there was nothing out of the ordinary, and in fact they would have not started any of these investigations.

Investigation of Electoral List Distribution and Use

Mr. Nenshi: The Premier has continually said, “We have to wait; we have to wait for the investigations,” even just now, but there’s already a big problem. The guy who got her elected, David Parker, is now refusing to co-operate with the investigation. Does the Premier understand that this is a very serious problem? Does she still think that eviscerating Elections Alberta was the right thing to do?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, there’s been no evisceration. Elections Alberta received a complaint March 31, they received a complaint March 21, and then they also looked at their seeded list on April 24 and realized that it cross-referenced with another political party, and that’s when the investigation was launched and that’s when the police were called in. This, in fact, looks to me like a process working exactly as it should. The Chief Electoral Officer is responsible for the list. They have their own investigative arm, and they have the power under the Public Inquiries Act to get to the bottom of it. Let’s let them do that.

The Speaker: Let’s hear the question and the answer.

Mr. Nenshi: Again, the Premier and her government knew about this and did nothing and did not start any investigations. The Premier, frankly, should have known that this was going to happen. Her separatist friends have shown nothing but contempt for the law and for Elections Alberta in particular. That is, by the way, following the Premier’s own example of insulting justices she disagrees with and putting herself above the law. On April 18 Mr. Parker said, “Elections Alberta is an evil institution.” Can the Premier today clearly state that no one, not her, not David Parker, is above the law?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I will say is that I do not want to prejudge the outcome of an investigation. I and the member opposite should also be very careful about anything that we say here that might be perceived that way that could derail the accountability that I think both sides of this Chamber are looking for. They have identified who the offending parties are. They are going through and looking at how the material got into the hands incorrectly, and they’re already offering some policy suggestions about how we might change that. We have to let that follow through the process, and I fully expect there’ll be accountability at the end of it. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Let's just hear the people recognized.

Mr. Nenshi: The Premier now talks a good game about accountability while saying that there was nothing out of the ordinary. But there's a real danger here. Mr. Parker and, we believe, some of the other people who downloaded the entire voter list are refusing to cooperate with the cease-and-desist order. What that means is that they're still using the personal data of 3 million Albertans for their own nefarious behaviour. Let's be clear here. The Premier has, though she doesn't like to admit it, all the power of government to help others. What is she doing to protect Albertans' safety while the people she herself empowers flout the law?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, the chief electoral office has the powers that they need because they have gone to court. They have demanded the names. They have issued cease-and-desist orders. They have the ability to go to court. They have the ability to call in the police, which they have done. For our part we have indicated to anyone who feels at risk that we have a number, 211, where we've consolidated all of the access to all of our different programs. If anyone feels at risk, they should call 211, and they will be connected with a social worker or a caseworker who will be able to help them address any issues that they may have, Mr. Speaker. But we all want to get to the bottom of this.

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

Mr. Nenshi: To summarize, it's not out of the ordinary, and they're doing nothing to help Albertans.

Provincial Response to Electoral List Disclosure (continued)

Mr. Nenshi: You know, Mr. Speaker, in the Watergate scandal we learned that it's not always the crime; it's the cover-up. The thing about this government: despite all the horrible things they do, their defence is even worse. It's about how they respond when they're backed into a corner. Instead of showing empathy and compassion and leadership, they do what they always do and lash out at their enemies rather than fix the problem. Will the Premier take responsibility if not for the data breach, at least for her government's terrible response to it?

Ms Smith: Well, I think he's talking about himself, Mr. Speaker. More lawsuits than I can count from developers, from the head of Uber. He's had to apologize multiple times. Multiple lawsuits.

On this side of the Chamber, Mr. Speaker, we let legal and criminal processes play themselves out, and that is what needs to happen here. We have investigations that are going on. We have to have confidence in the agencies that are empowered to do this work and not undermine them the way the member opposite is. I would ask for him to refrain from acting as if he doesn't trust the integrity of the process. [interjections]

2:00

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Nenshi: The Premier's answer to a question about why she always insults her perceived enemies is to insult her perceived enemies. That's all she's got. This government's strategy is ridiculous. Their strategy is to blame me for not telling them about a meeting they knew about. That failed miserably, but something interesting happened in all of that. The Premier made an oddly

specific allegation, which is being repeated right there, about how and when we informed the RCMP. To be clear, those allegations are wrong, but can the Premier tell us who told her what e-mail address we sent the complaint to?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite indicated in this Chamber that he picked up the phone and made a phone call, which we know he did not do. The fact of the matter is that we know now, by talking and piecing it together after the fact, when the investigations launched. There has been news reporting on this. We've seen when the investigations were launched. We've seen when Elections Alberta realized that the breach had occurred. We've also seen when they pinpointed which party was responsible, which was not this party. It was not the party of the members opposite either. We should make sure that we support Elections Alberta and the RCMP as they continue their work.

Mr. Nenshi: That answer holds no water and no historical accuracy.

Let's be clear. The minister of public safety heckled in this House that he'd been in contact with the RCMP about this investigation. Surely, the Premier, having her wrist slapped by the Ethics Commissioner for interfering in criminal matters, which she has a record of doing, knows that that would be highly inappropriate. The Premier wants us to think that she controls everything, but she's not above the rule of law, so did the government interfere with the RCMP investigation, and if not, why are the Premier and her minister implying that they did?

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That member opposite is all over the place, on the one hand telling us to get involved; on the other hand, when we're trying to find out who knew what when, saying that we shouldn't get involved. It's important for everyone to understand the timeline here, to understand when the complaints were made, to understand when the party that leaked the list was identified. All of that has been identified in the public by the media. I think that's an important consideration for the members of this Chamber to have as we're looking forward to any potential legislative changes that we may need to make, but that work begins after this investigation is over. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Okay. The next question. We should only hear now from the Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Provincial Fuel Tax

Member Ellingson: Last week the NDP asked for an emergency debate on the high price of gas and its impact on everyday Albertans, but the UCP refused to even have a conversation about suspending their tax at the pump even though gas prices remain sky-high across the province. The Premier could fix this problem today by suspending the provincial gas tax. There's still time in this session to give Albertans a break. Why won't this government lift a finger to make life more affordable for everyday Albertans, starting with suspending the provincial gas tax?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I think many jurisdictions are grappling if they should do something with their respective fuel taxes. None have a system in place like Alberta, and we're very unique in the fact that our royalty take is very correlated to the price of oil. We bring in a higher rate of royalties at higher price of oil

when the price at the pumps is, obviously, higher, so the system that we have in place keeps the province in a place where we can maybe stick to the \$9.4 billion deficit without piling more on top of it or without having to cut the transportation maintenance.

The Speaker: Order. Order. Minister, when I stand up, you've got to stop talking.

Member Ellingson: Without a system, others have actually done something, and we have a system and have done nothing. The government is raking in record revenues from the oil industry while ordinary Albertans are struggling to pay for fuel, but this Finance minister and this Premier have blown a boom during the boom, running a \$9.4 billion deficit despite record revenues and royalties. Yesterday the Premier defended giving her parliamentary secretaries \$6,000 in raises for doing nothing. How can the Premier spend so much money padding backbenchers' pockets without helping out Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, there's a lot there, and I do think it's rich coming from the NDP. After all, the carbon tax that was legitimized across the country started in this House. In its last days it added 17 cents a litre to the price of fuel across the country. Our 13 cents goes to fixing transportation and highway maintenance across Alberta, which I do think Albertans expect. We're also the government that cut personal income taxes, which meant about a billion and a half off of our revenue line, to try to help Albertans here and now dealing with this affordability crisis.

Member Ellingson: So shocked by the carbon tax but willing to do nothing about your own fuel tax.

Albertans are being crushed by an unprecedented cost-of-living crisis; 60 per cent of people are saying that affordability is their biggest daily concern. Savings at the pump through a pause in the provincial fuel tax would go a long way to helping struggling Albertans. These folks who are paying these bills didn't get a \$6,000 raise that the UCP members just got last week. What will it take for this Premier to finally look out for regular people, stop wasting money on her own members, and get . . .

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we're about to enter the monitoring period for the upcoming quarter. From May 18 to June 15 will be the next monitoring period. If oil is above \$80, the tax will start to come off. If it's above \$90, the tax will come off completely, and it will remain off for the entire quarter. Something else to note is that it can't come back in full. If oil were to be over \$90 during the monitoring period, it would come off for the entire quarter. It can only go back on in pieces, not more than 9 cents. So you'd see relief even into the quarter that follows. [interjections]

The Speaker: Are we done? I was hoping so because we should only hear now from the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Electoral Boundaries Committee Review

Ms Ganley: In complete contravention of democracy the UCP have thrown out the normal fair process for drawing election boundaries and set up a committee for MLAs, majority UCP, of course, to draw the maps. The Premier has defended this, claiming that MLAs and the advisory committee will use the fair, independent maps as a starting point. But the UCP MLAs on the committee seem a bit confused on that front, so for all of us: does the government motion

require the committee to use the fair maps as a starting point, or did the Premier get it wrong?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We know that the report that was tabled contained important recommendations from the committee, including addendum 5, which urged this Legislature to consider increasing the number of seats to coincide with the population growth that this province has experienced. That bill is before the Assembly here, Bill 32. It is going through third reading perhaps tonight and, hopefully, if it passes, we'll see the recommendations of the Hon. Justice Miller come to reality.

The Speaker: Questions about proceedings or work of a committee can't be raised during question period as per the procedures, page 425. Please go ahead.

Ms Ganley: Given that MLAs drawing the maps is a clear contravention of democracy but if the government really thinks its process is fair, they shouldn't be afraid of the public watching and given that it strains credulity for the UCP to claim that all of the UCP MLAs just spontaneously voted to allow secret deliberations, what is the government policy on this? Does the Premier think that secret meetings to rig democracy are okay, or did her MLAs just go rogue?

The Speaker: The hon. Justice minister.

Mr. Amery: Thank you once again, Mr. Speaker. The questions get stranger and stranger. The committee's role is to select or appoint a special advisory committee that will then review and implement the recommendations of the Electoral Boundaries Commission report. That's what they're doing. The committee that is doing this work operates independently of government. Certainly, it's comprised of members of this side of the Assembly and, of course, that side of the Assembly. Their deliberations are not dictated by government nor guided by government. It's an independent committee. Let's let them do their job.

2:10

The Speaker: If the hon. member wants to finish their question, it shouldn't be about the committee.

Ms Ganley: Given that the normal process for drawing boundaries involves an independent commission and a judge is selected to chair on the advice of the Chief Justice to prevent any possibility of political favour trading and given that the Acting Chief Justice has declined to participate in the selection of a chair for the advisory panel, citing irregularity of the process, and given that Government Motion 37 is entirely illegitimate and undemocratic, will the government do the right thing, respect the right to vote, and throw out the select special committee and adopt the map proposed by the commission?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you once again, Mr. Speaker. Despite two prior cautions the member continues to read her notes and ask about committee work. This is not government policy. But here's the reality. The chair of this special advisory committee will be chosen by members of the Legislature. That is the most democratic way of doing this. Certainly, it is a recommendation that was . . .

Mr. Eggen: The UCP government was cheating on the elections. Period.

Mr. Amery: . . . provided for by the committee's report in addendum 5.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, this government and this Legislature are implementing the recommendations of the committee word for word. That's how it's supposed to be. I would ask that the members opposite respect the process.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:11.
Grande Prairie.

Canada-Alberta Workforce Tariff Response

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has now been just over a year since our biggest trading partner and closest ally, the United States, implemented tariffs that have created global economic uncertainty. Alberta, although incredibly tough, is not immune to these impacts, especially in steel and softwood lumber sectors. Businesses have acted quickly, at times facing higher costs or making changes to their supply chains. To the minister of Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration: what has Alberta done to maintain and build a relationship with the U.S. and help Alberta's businesses to succeed?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank that member for the excellent question. Under the diplomatic leadership of our Premier Alberta is taking a diplomatic approach with the largest trading partner our province has, the United States, and our closest ally. Just this morning members of our government met with the U.S. delegation of midwestern senators and representatives. Let me be clear. We believe in and advocating for a tariff-free relationship between the United States and Canada, and the approach we have taken of diplomacy and respectful debate, not insulting our partners, is the right one.

The Speaker: Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that tariffs hurt both the U.S. and Canadian economies, sometimes leading to businesses needing to rapidly upskill their workers or worse, Albertans losing their jobs, which impacts both Canadian and American businesses not having access to products from their strongest integrated supply chain partners, and given that Alberta's economy remains the fastest growing in Canada and major investment continues to choose our province, to the minister: what are you doing to help upskill workers, which helps Albertans and our partners build and use products across supply chains, prevent job loss, create better pathways to employment and career opportunities?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just today we have announced \$68.5 million over three years to support workers and businesses impacted by tariffs along with the government of Canada. This funding through the new Canada-Alberta workforce tariff response will help upskill, train, and support those directly and indirectly affected by the shifting global economy. The fact is that even in the face of economic uncertainty, Alberta is still growing the economy, something the members opposite could never even dream of.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that workforce development is a top priority of this government as Alberta is known to be the best place to live, work, and raise a family and given that this partnership with the government of Canada will help ensure Albertans have access to the skills, training, and employment supports needed to succeed in a changing economy, to the minister of Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration: can you share how this funding prepares workers for the jobs today and tomorrow and builds our workforce?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the funding announced today, we'll expand existing programs and also launch new workforce resilience programs. Now, other initiatives such as the Canada-Alberta productivity grant, the workforce training program, the transition of employment services program, the foundational learning assistance program, and many others help Alberta workers ensure that they are continually skilled and upskilled to meet the challenges of tomorrow. Overall, we expect the increase in funding to help more than 7,800 workers across the province, ensuring they can continue to pay their bills, pay their mortgages, and put food on the table.

Alberta Separatism and Economic Development

Member Hoyle: After seven years of the UCP Alberta should be focused on building economic certainty, not fuelling a separatist agenda. Instead, the Premier gave taxpayer-funded \$6,000 raises to parliamentary secretaries even as some promote the very separatist rhetoric that's damaging Alberta's reputation. Parliamentary secretaries' words carry weight on issues like constitutional affairs, national unity, and investor confidence. How does this government justify rewarding them with raises while separatist chaos grows under their watch and undermines Alberta's economy?

Mr. Schow: The only ones creating chaos and talking about separatism are the members of the NDP, and it is rich coming from the NDP, lecturing the government about economic development and supporting Alberta's economy, Mr. Speaker. That is the same party that has no plan when talking about the economy. We are investing in making sure that we have new products, new manufacturing here. While the members opposite were in government, they drove investment away. In fact, they literally told Albertans to leave the province to find meaningful employment.

Member Hoyle: Given that business leaders are warning that separation talks create uncertainty, which drives investment away, and given that every Alberta MLA is elected to serve within Canada's democratic institutions to uphold unity and stability for Alberta's economy and given that the Member for Red Deer-South publicly encouraged Albertans to sign the separatist petition, can this government explain why taxpayers are funding a \$6,000 raise for a member whose words are promoting division, fuelling business uncertainty, and weakening investor confidence?

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, no plan from the members opposite to deal with the challenges of today. You have a real contrast between the government and the opposition. On the opposition side they campaigned to increase taxes on people. They campaigned to introduce a PST and to raise taxes on businesses, in addition to the carbon tax, the job-killing carbon tax they introduced many years ago that we would all love to forget. On this side of the

House we have reduced taxes on individuals, saving individual households \$1,500 a month. That is real leadership in keeping Alberta affordable.

Member Hoyle: Given that Alberta workers, businesses, and families depend on investment certainty for jobs and economic growth and given that this UCP government is not willing to admit that fuelling separatist talks is hurting Alberta's economy, how many jobs and investments are Albertans expected to risk losing before this government admits that the separatist talks are damaging Alberta's economy during an affordability crisis?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, the most damaging era in this province's history was between 2015 and 2019 when the NDP was in government under the disastrous leadership of Rachel Notley. Under this government we continue to see investments in manufacturing around the province, both urban and rural. Just recently I was at the announcement for Structural Truss, an existing business that has new operations in Fort Macleod, showing that there's faith in the government's plan to create a fair regulatory environment that can help businesses thrive and create new jobs and prosperity.

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

**Investigation of Electoral List
Distribution and Use**
(continued)

Member Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier's close political ally David Parker is in the news again. Remember him? The separatist leader of the Centurion Project. When the RCMP and Elections Alberta shut down Parker's operations, he immediately stated that he would comply with the investigations into the unlawful use of almost 3 million Albertans' personal data. Now he says that he won't. David Parker's combative history and loose relationship with the law is deeply concerning. He cannot be trusted. Will the Premier really let him get away with the largest data breach in Canada's history?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We know that there are ongoing investigations involving a number of individuals who are alleged to have been involved in this data breach. That has nothing to do with the United Conservative Party. It doesn't have anything to do with this government. Other parties and individuals have been named. As those are active investigations, we'll decline to comment on that except to say that the law allows the Election Commissioner to compel the attendance of anybody under the Public Inquiries Act.

The Speaker: Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you. Given the buck clearly does not stop with this Premier, given that at a presser yesterday the Premier gave us a tortured account of just how dysfunctional her office is, all the while throwing another staffer under the bus for their awareness of misuse of elector data, and given that this Premier, who is supposed to be in charge, is blaming her staffer, blaming his boss, blaming the caucus whip, blaming the Leader of the Opposition, for pity's sake, and blaming everyone except David Parker, why won't the Premier call out the person responsible for the data breach, her pal David Parker?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In our system of democracy we have institutions that operate independently from government in order to investigate and learn about what happens, collect and gather evidence, and then move forward with potential sanctions if necessary. That's how our system operates here. There are presumptions involved, there are investigators involved, and, most importantly of all, independence of these institutions must be respected. The RCMP is investigating. Elections Alberta is investigating. We'll let those institutions do their jobs.

Member Ceci: Given that the Premier has shown Albertans that her government will side with the separatists time and again and given that those same independent institutions have been hobbled by this government and given that the separatists are responsible for the largest data breach in Alberta's history, orchestrated by the Premier's pal David Parker, and given that just yesterday the Premier refused to rule out the referendum the separatists have been demanding all along despite their theft of millions of Albertans' personal data, who's driving the bus over there? Is it the Premier, or is she letting the separatists take the wheel?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. We've said time and again that we will support these agencies and institutions and their investigations. We will provide adequate resources and support wherever appropriate and necessary, and we'll continue to do that. We want Elections Alberta to conduct its investigation. We want the RCMP to continue its investigation. Of course, now we know that the Privacy Commissioner has opened their own investigation as well. These organizations, agencies, and independent offices have investigative bodies and arms that do this. Let's let them do their jobs. We're not going to interfere with what they do.

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

Pipeline Development

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's energy sector continues to play a critical role in driving economic growth and supporting jobs across our province with global demand for reliable, responsibly produced energy and ongoing discussions around expanding pipeline capacity to access new international markets for long-term economic prosperity. To the Minister of Energy and Minerals: could you please update this Assembly on how our government is working to advance pipeline development and improve market access for Alberta's energy producers?

Mr. Jean: Finally, a question relevant to the goings-on and the business of the government, Mr. Speaker. We're working with Ottawa every single day to try to get a new 1-million-barrels-per-day pipeline to the west coast. We're creating an environment of confidence with industry. The Premier has indicated that we have a goal of doubling our oil production by 2035, and we're going to do just that. The Alberta treasury branch has indicated that an additional 1.5 million barrels per day of pipeline capacity will generate \$31.4 billion of economic activity annually. We're getting the job done for Albertans because it's all about Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that the discussions between Alberta and the federal government highlight the potential for a new pipeline to expand

access to international markets and further given that securing investment regulatory certainty is critical to advancing projects that support jobs and growth across our province, to the same minister: what is our government doing to strengthen investor confidence and ensure Alberta remains competitive and attractive for energy development?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, our Premier identified early on that there were nine bad federal laws that need to be gotten rid of in order to move forward with confidence from industry and get some things done. We're working with the government to get rid of those bad laws. We're working and getting progress on an MOU on a single environment standard of review between the province and the federal government. We're moving forward with methane standards that are going to help the world. We're scrapping the oil and gas emissions cap and clean electricity renovation regulations. We're building global trade partnerships, especially in Asia. We're doing so much. We're getting the job done.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that expanding pipeline capacity not only strengthens Alberta's economy but also helps secure better prices for our resources and supports long-term job creation and further given that Albertans expect continued leadership in developing our energy sector responsibly, can the same minister please provide an update on how our government is working with partners to ensure timely progress on pipeline projects while maintaining strong environmental and economic outcomes?

Mr. Jean: We are leading the way, Mr. Speaker. We've moved forward with an Expedited 120-Day Approvals Act, moving forward with major projects more quickly. In fact, the federal government has somewhat emulated us on that. We've heard from investors that they wanted certainty and clarity, and they've received that. They're getting more and more every day. We're moving forward to make sure that the regulator works with industry to get things done, to have things happen. We're making sure that we don't sacrifice Indigenous consultations, don't sacrifice our environment. We are making sure that the Constitution is respected in our . . .

The Speaker: Edmonton-Rutherford.

Jasper Wildfire Recovery

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been two years since the Jasper fire devastated the community. Jasper is an important place to many families. My chapan Louis Kwarakwante is still buried up in those mountains, and two years ago his memorial burned. Homes burned, forests burned, and so many memories burned along with them. Officials from the Emergency Management Agency admitted that the province lacks a new intergovernmental emergency management agreement with Parks Canada and the federal government. Does the province have a concrete plan to protect Jasper from future wildfires?

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for the question. Obviously, this government's number one priority is the safety and protection of Alberta communities. Just to be certain, though, Parks Canada was the lead on that Jasper fire, but Alberta Wildfire was there from day one to help with

anything that they needed. In fact, we positioned our personnel and equipment closer to Jasper once the fire started to make sure that they were ready. I think when we look at what we need to do to protect communities, we've been working with Parks Canada more intently to protect the communities on federal lands. That's both parks and First Nations.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the Jasper wildfire, the federal government and the provincial government started talks to develop a memorandum of understanding to co-ordinate during future responses and given that it's been two years and there's still no MOU, is the minister going to sign a memorandum of understanding with the federal government so Albertans can have confidence that when the next wildfire breaks out, the government will respond and not get distracted by jurisdictional finger pointing while homes and habitats burn?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's government through the Ministry of Forestry and Parks is working with Parks Canada to strengthen the existing wildfire agreement by enhancing wildfire mitigation, sharing data and response provisions that better protect Alberta communities located within and adjacent to national parks. At the operational level provincial and federal staff continue to work closely together. Local Forestry and Parks offices regularly collaborate with Parks Canada counterparts, including the Edson forest area and Jasper national park as well as the Calgary forest area and Banff and Waterton national parks. These teams meet throughout the year to co-ordinate wildfire priorities, share information, and align response.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Given that there are still families fighting with insurance to get their homes rebuilt in Jasper and given that Jasper's postincident review found that the provincial government actually made the wildfire response worse and given that the government is now expecting private insurance companies to step up where the UCP have dropped the ball, what is the strategy for this province to ensure that after two years people get their homes built this construction season and protections in place in Jasper along with anywhere else in our province so that Albertans don't have to face the mess of bureaucracy and jurisdictional warfare?

2:30

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government was on the scene in Jasper, immediately working towards housing people in emergencies but also starting to rebuild the town. Unfortunately, we never saw any federal ministers for weeks before they arrived inside that area, and the national park service made decisions that blocked Alberta from investing over \$100 million in housing.

We stand ready to help the national park service whenever we can. It is extremely disappointing to see how Jasper national park has proceeded. The fact that the town is not rebuilt is very . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Agricultural Support Programs

Mr. Wiebe: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta farmers are paying the price for instability halfway around the world. The ongoing conflicts around the Strait of Hormuz are driving up global fertilizer

prices even though Canada produces a significant amount of nitrogen. Still, fertilizer prices are tied to global replacement values. Farmers in Alberta are facing rising costs that they did not cause and cannot control. To the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation: what is the government doing to ensure Alberta farmers are protected from global issues like this one?

Mr. Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, our government understands that rising costs are putting real pressure on Alberta farmers. While we can't control fuel and fertilizer increases caused by global conflict, we do have supports in place through a suite of business risk management programs. Programs like AgriStability are available to provide compensation when producers face severe losses, including those caused by increased input costs. I encourage all farmers to consider all supports available through AFSC to help manage risks and keep their operations strong.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that in NDP-run provinces like B.C., investment is running away, as seen with Nutrien, where they left for Washington state, taking an estimated \$500 million to \$1 billion worth of investment, and given that they left because of rail and port disruptions and lack of federal focus on expanding infrastructure, to the same minister: how does our government differ in managing and advocacy for big investments related to agriculture?

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, Mr. Speaker, the difference couldn't be clearer. Under the NDP billions in investment was driven away by uncertainty and red tape. Our government is focused on stability and growth with the lowest corporate tax rate in the country, no PST, and incentives like our agriprocessing investment tax credit. In addition, this government is calling on the federal government to exempt all agriproducts from rail and port strikes and to meaningfully expand port and rail access. We'll continue to support the agricultural industry and ensure that investment stays and grows right here at home.

The Speaker: Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister. Given that this conflict exposes a deeper vulnerability – even countries that produce fertilizer are exposed to geopolitical conflict – and given that if instability persists, farmers will continue to face uncertainty that undermines planning, investment, and confidence in the sector, to the same minister: what is the government doing to strengthen Alberta's long-term fertilizer security and price stability so that Alberta farmers are less vulnerable to future global conflicts?

Mr. Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, we recognize that global instability has highlighted the need for longer term resilience, and that's why I've been formally engaging with producers and industry leaders through roundtables and ongoing discussions over the past few weeks. These conversations are helping inform our approach under the next policy framework, and we're bringing these priorities forward to the federal government to ensure the next Canadian agricultural partnership reflects the needs of Alberta farmers and ranchers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Electoral List Disclosure and Domestic Violence Prevention

Ms Hayter: Alberta is facing a crisis of femicide, with an increase in reporting in both family violence and intimate partner violence.

Women were already living in fear of their offenders finding them and their children, fear of being trapped, found, harassed, or harmed. The unauthorized publication of Alberta's list of electors, of more than 2.9 million Albertans, is a serious privacy breach. For these women, though, it's also a direct safety risk. To the minister of public safety: why is the UCP government not protecting women's safety in light of this massive data breach?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, certainly the government is very proud to be endorsed by Kim Ruse from Fear is Not Love when we did the electronic monitoring. We can tell you that we take domestic violence extremely seriously. We want to make sure that all victims of domestic violence certainly have the coverage that they need and that they're protected, and that's why, of course, we took the necessary steps in doing electronic monitoring and investing \$4.1 million to make sure that we have that ankle monitoring bracelet program.

Thank you.

Ms Hayter: Given that for victims of domestic and sexual violence privacy is critical to safety but given that the list of electors that's being released by the UCP-supporting separatists included names, addresses, and phone numbers without consent and given that this breach has increased danger, deepened trauma, and created barriers to seeking help – this is a serious privacy beach for all Albertans, but for survivors of violence, it is a direct safety risk – and given that this has exposed women who are rebuilding their lives to tracking, harassment, and renewed violence, to the minister: what is this government doing to fill the gaps in provincial privacy . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister of public safety.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, this data breach was completely unacceptable. I want to thank the law enforcement community for stepping up and making sure that they are doing whatever they can to keep Albertans safe. I want to thank them for doing whatever they can to keep Canadians safe. I can tell you that this government has certainly done Clare's law. We've expanded Clare's law under Bill 4 to ensure that they have all the tools in the tool box that they need to keep victims of domestic violence safe, and I can tell you that there are enormous other programs that we have in place in the government also to keep the victims of domestic violence safe.

Ms Hayter: Given survivors of violence have built safety plans, already changed their addresses and their phone numbers, done everything possible to avoid being found by their abuser and given that they've already installed the doorbell cameras, the security systems, are double-checking the house locks, turning the outside lights on, and looking over their shoulders and given that privacy is personal and it is critical to safety – strong privacy protections save lives – what's more important to this government: letting their separatist friends get away with the biggest breach in Alberta's history, or finally doing the right thing and protecting Alberta women?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, this is precisely why the offences that are being investigated by Elections Alberta as well as those being investigated by law enforcement, which are criminal code offences, are taken extremely seriously, and that's why there are severe penalties for committing these types of crimes. We're talking about years in prison. We're talking about enormous fines. Right now I'd like to thank members of the RCMP, I'd like to thank members of all the law enforcement communities, and I'd like to thank any of the investigative bodies who are investigating this very, very serious breach.

The Speaker: Banff-Kananaskis

Tourism Workforce Recruitment and Retention

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the province's premier tourist destinations Canmore and Banff are reliant on newcomers to work in tourism to serve millions of visitors annually. All workers in the Bow Valley, from housekeepers to servers and hotel managers, are essential to a thriving regional economy, but staffing shortages continue to plague businesses as job postings go unanswered and the high cost of living limits the number of people who can work and live in the Bow Valley, thus impacting business productivity. With all of the UCP's increased rhetoric against immigrants, how is the minister attracting people to work in our community's tourism sector?

Mr. Boitchenko: Well, Mr. Speaker, a great question right there about the tourism in Jasper and Lake Louise, Kananaskis, Banff. We, as Albertans, have an ambitious plan to increase our tourism to \$25 billion by 2035, and we are leading the country in tourism growth. We are actually growing our economy and seeing more tourists coming from the U.S. than any other province.

Dr. Elmeligi: Given all that tourism will require staff and given that many businesses rely on temporary foreign workers to cook the food, make the beds, and serve the coffee for guests and given that many qualified TFWs are being forced to leave as their permits expire and no qualified replacements can be found, causing many businesses to consider shorter hours during our busiest season, and given that these workers fill shortages in industries in rural areas that struggle to find Canadians to fill these essential jobs, what is the minister doing to support tourism businesses in the Bow Valley to retain the staff they employ on working visas?

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Just a second, Mr. Speaker. I'm just looking through the NDP's campaign platform on anything about tourism strategy related. It doesn't exist. Absolutely no plan for the members opposite to build the tourism sector, which is real economic development in this province. I can tell you that we have done more for the tourism sector than the members opposite could even think about, including the all-season resorts strategy, which will bring more investment in this province, creating more great-paying . . .

2:40

The Speaker: Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Given that summer is approaching and many businesses are worried about keeping sufficient staff onboard as TFWs are leaving and given the federal government announced a targeted TFW program for rural employers, including temporarily increasing the low-wage TFW cap from 10 to 15 per cent of the workforce, and given the provinces need to formally request participation but Alberta has not and given meeting the government's objective to double tourism requires people, Mr. Speaker, why is the minister not working with the tourism sector to help find and retain employees?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, I cannot believe the member opposite is talking about youth unemployment when it's the members opposite who voted against the budget that would have put significant resources to help youth get involved in the employment sector with the youth hiring incentive. Why do the members opposite want to see Albertans not have first opportunity at Alberta jobs, including in the tourism sector? This is a thriving, energetic sector with so

much to offer, especially entry-level positions, and the members opposite voted against it.

The Speaker: Members, in 30 seconds we'll continue with the daily Routine.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. One is the essay I referred to today in my member's statement by Darryl Learie.

The other is a letter from Barrier-Free Alberta dated April 28 to the Premier and ministers of social services and Municipal Affairs.

The Speaker: Calgary-Foothills.

Member Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the requisite five copies of an e-mail from my constituent Gail entitled Brother with Disabilities at Risk of Eviction Due to AISH Cut.

The Speaker: Calgary-Currie.

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I table five copies from the *Globe and Mail* entitled While Overdose Deaths Fall across the Country, the Streets of Edmonton Reveal a Different Picture. It looks like they're going to be beating their record of deaths from 2025 unfortunately. [interjection]

The Speaker: Order. We're doing tablings now.
Edmonton-West Henday.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite copies of two articles here. One, the *Globe and Mail* article, which refers to the minister of public safety receiving a private report from RCMP alleging no foreign interference in the separatist movement.

And then the second one is an article titled The Giants at the Gate: First Nations Are Fighting Russia, the U.S., and a Province that Won't Listen by Brandi Morin in the *Indigenous Insider*, May 7, 2026.

The Speaker: Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is a letter from the Rocky View county reeve and council expressing concerns about Bill 28 and detailing their feedback from constituents.

The other two: one is a letter from the Canmore public library; the other is a letter from the Banff public library, expressing concerns about Bill 28 and requesting further consultation.

The Speaker: Are there more? Edmonton . . .

Mr. Schow: Highlands-Norwood.

The Speaker: Highlands-Norwood. Sorry, I just lost my tongue there for a minute.

Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, please.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of an e-mail from a young person named Cayden. He is just very concerned about the data breach and is ashamed to be an Albertan right now.

The Speaker: Tablings? Seeing none.

Oh, did you have a tabling, Government House Leader?

Mr. Schow: I do not have a tabling, but I rise to ask for unanimous consent on a matter, Mr. Speaker, if this is the appropriate time.

The Speaker: Let's hear it.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to ask for unanimous consent of the Assembly to revert briefly to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Glubish: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We didn't have time earlier, but I appreciate the time now. I would just like to invite my uncle Dave Broadfoot and his friend Joel Teeling to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to be able to welcome fantastic volunteer board members on my electoral district association board. I'm very, very appreciative of their support. I ask them to rise. Todd Sikorski, Sharon Gillman, Johanna Flipsen, Don Cruikshank, and Guy Desjardins,* thank you so much.

The Speaker: Calgary-Currie.

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, certainly last but not least, goodness knows we could not do the work that we do in our offices without the exceptional staff that we have to run those places. I'd like to welcome Lisa Leavitt, my constituency manager, and Cheryl Fedechko, a wonderful social work practicum student from Bow Valley College who's going to be with us until July. Please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: That takes us to points of order, of which there was one at 2:11, called by the government side.

Point of Order

Allegations against Members

Mr. Williams: Yes, Mr. Speaker. At the moment, 2:11, that you indicated, the Member for Edmonton-North West was speaking and said, according to our notes, quote, that the UCP government is cheating on the election maps. Now, we do note that the member was talking about the government as a whole. We appreciate that.

However, April 20, 2026, on page 1541 of *Hansard* the Speaker made a ruling, yourself, in reference to what the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, a colleague of the member on the other side of the aisle, said. "The UCP is drawing electoral boundaries. It is drawing the map. So when exactly did the UCP decide to cheat to win the next election?" Again, not specifying an individual; speaking to us as a whole. Of course, you remember very well the ruling that was made.

Hon. member, cheating in an election is breaking the law. I will caution... Accusing [someone] of cheating in an election is accusing them of breaking the law. We won't have it. If I hear... anymore, we'll ask for an apology.

Mr. Speaker, I believe we have heard more, and I believe it is proper for the Speaker to ask for an apology from the Member for Edmonton-North West.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and respond to this point of order. I disagree, and I am very interested in your ruling today. Under 23(h), (i), and (j) it speaks to making allegations against members, imputing false motives against members, "abusive or insulting language of a nature... to create disorder." I believe that the government has close to the accurate quote, but I don't have the benefit of the Blues. This was a heckle, and sometimes speaking out of turn is ruled out. But talking about the collective, the UCP government, and in this case talking about cheating on electoral maps: I would like to submit to you that this should be a matter of debate.

Now, on April 20 I believe that was the record number of points of order in this Assembly. Unfortunately, I was not the person to argue all of those points of order, so I have been reviewing the *Hansard* on that. On that day, as an example, the word "cheating" was used, and a member lost their question, but in following up about that situation, talking about the government cheating – and an act of cheating is not something that is illegal. It is about gaining advantage or bending the rules. It can be done explicitly or implicitly, and I think it's an important matter of debate.

In my reviewing of the rulings of April 20 specifically and conversations since then it is my understanding that talking about the collective and the actions of this government, whether they may or may not be cheating or other things that may be happening – gerrymandering, as an example – are things that are not illegal. It should be a matter of debate, and it should be something that we can speak to here. I certainly agree that we should never talk about an individual member. Had that happened, I would be happy to apologize and withdraw, but I believe that this is a matter of debate, and I hope that this is not ruled out of order.

Given the number of rulings that happened on April 20 and the many conversations that have happened since, your ruling here will be helpful going forward. I believe it should be a matter of debate, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to your ruling.

2:50

The Speaker: Well, I have the Blues, and I actually heard the comment myself. I was actually tempted to stop proceedings there, but I didn't, and that's okay. The Justice minister said, "Certainly, it is a recommendation that was..." and at that point the Member for Edmonton-North West said, "The UCP government was cheating on the elections. Period." My ruling may not be helpful for anybody today because there is precedent that kind of rides the rail down the middle on this one, where sometimes the word "cheating" has been called a point of order and sometimes it hasn't.

Where is it? *Hansard* from May 28, 2019:

I would certainly caution members... with respect to using words like "cheating," "cheater," "cheated" as we go forward...

I'll send it out to the member as a cautionary tale and encourage you to refrain from using the word "cheated" for the rest of the evening. [I may have more to say.]

I'm going to call this a matter of debate. All should be warned. I may go the other way at any minute because this is just not something that's helpful, accusing, even if it's collectively, of cheating, all right? If you use that phraseology, it doesn't guarantee that you won't have to eat your words in the future. This matter is concluded.

*These spellings could not be verified at the time of publication.

Orders of the Day

Private Bills Third Reading

Bill Pr. 1

The Ranchmen's Club Ordinance Amendment Act, 2026

The Speaker: The hon. Member – I get to do that; I'm protecting my job here – for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move third reading of Bill Pr. 1, The Ranchmen's Club Ordinance Amendment Act, 2026.

If I might say a few words about that, my name is on this bill, of course, this private bill, because the venerable Ranchmen's Club is located in the riding of Calgary-Buffalo, specifically on 13th Avenue between 6th Street and 7th Street SW, a quarter of that full block. When I saw this bill on the committee agenda of which I sit, I reached out to the lawyer for the Ranchmen's. I asked that lawyer, the hon. Tyler Shandro, if I could replace another person who was initially listed on the bill, and that was the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. The Cypress-Medicine Hat member kindly agreed that I could have my name on this instead of him. Mr. Shandro had originally reached out to that member and asked for support around sponsoring the bill. That's changed, obviously.

There are two changes being made to the Ranchmen's Club ordinance, to the current articles governing the Ranchmen's Club, and I'll get to those in a minute. I'm happy to sponsor this bill as I've been and many people here probably have been to many events, announcements, and the like at the Ranchmen's Club. Most recently I was there for the Canadian club of Calgary's presentation on the need to protect Alberta's eastern slopes from coal mining. I've been to season announcements for the Alberta Ballet.

I've been to my own presentation at a luncheon of the King Charles coronation medal to a gentleman named Carlo Simonelli for his work for 30, 40 years in Calgary of creating 20 companies, of which 18 still exist. Hundreds and hundreds of people are employed in his companies.

I've been to various luncheons with stakeholders. You probably know this, Mr. Speaker. I can tell everyone here that the cheddar cheese appetizer at the Ranchmen's Club is the very best cheddar cheese in the world.

An Hon. Member: In the world? That's pretty awesome.

Member Ceci: It's really good.

Anyway, there are two changes to the articles of the Ranchmen's Club. The act, as it was known, was called An Ordinance to Incorporate the Ranchmen's Club of the Town of Calgary in 1891-1892. That incredible act is 134 years old, and it was updated in 1916. This Pr. 1 changes it to The Ranchmen's Club Ordinance Amendment Act, 2026, as you can see on the front cover.

The second change is the fact that – and hon. Mr. Shandro, when I was talking to him, said that, you know, they hadn't been following the second part of this change for a number of years, as you can imagine. They had a \$75,000 limit on any borrowings. The Ranchmen's Club has not been following that for a number of years, but they want to make everything legal there, so the second part of this is the removal of that portion of section 4, which presently reads – and I won't read it. The removal is “not to exceed in the whole the sum of seventy-five thousand dollars.” That's removed. They have been not following that rule for a number of years, but they have been following the rule of being good stewards of any borrowings and ensuring they pay all of their borrowings back.

With those two things said, Mr. Speaker, I hope all members can support Pr. 1 here and I can report to the hon. Mr. Shandro that this has passed and the Ranchmen's is in fine legal standing with the government of Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there more speakers? Seeing none.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a third time]

Bill Pr. 2

Prairie Bible Institute Amendment Act, 2026

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.
Order. Members, when I'm on my feet, you need to stop walking. Go ahead.

Mrs. Sawyer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move third reading of Bill Pr. 2, the Prairie Bible Institute Amendment Act, 2026.

As I've mentioned before, this bill proposes amendments that, if passed, will enable Prairie College, as it's now known, to broaden their academic mandate. Specifically, it will authorize the institution to confer undergraduate degrees as well as advanced credentials at the master's and doctoral level. I think it's important to note that Prairie College is a well-respected, long-serving institution with a strong history of educating Albertans. This expansion represents an exciting step forward not only for the college itself but for the many students who will walk its halls in the years ahead. It strengthens opportunity, supports higher learning in our province, and contributes to a more skilled and employable workforce.

With that, I would encourage all members to support the bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there more speakers? Seeing none, I think. Okay. No.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 29

Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2026

[Debate adjourned May 5: Mr. Eggen speaking]

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 29, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2026. You know, as I've been thinking about this government on health care, education, our democratic institutions, I've been thinking about termites. Termites are a pest we're fortunate that we don't really have up here, not a good climate for them, but it's fascinating what termites can do.

3:00

Termites work slowly. They work invisibly. They get into the structure of a home, and they don't just attack a single point, Mr. Speaker. No. The way termites work, the colonies: they spread out. They look for vulnerable points in that home: support beams, floors, walls, anywhere where there's a bit of wood, and it doesn't cause damage quickly, but the damage is widespread.

You know, the progress of the termite infestation starts slowly. There's minor hidden damage, first, to the structure. That's what you get in the first few months. Significant damage takes six months

to a year, where it really starts to erode the structure of a building or a home. Visible damage, that kind of substantial damage that starts to be noticeable to the homeowners: well, that takes about three to five years. Five years or more, Mr. Speaker: that's when you get total destruction, extreme structural failure if it isn't treated, if it isn't stopped.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that this government is like a termite infestation in our health care system, in our education system, in the very democratic institutions of our province. In the seven years this government has been in place, it has been steadily eroding every single one, everything that Albertans depend on. The fact is that governments are elected to be caretakers, to look after the things that matter to Albertans, to take care of them, to make them better, and this government has done precisely the opposite. They are tearing down. They're emptying and hollowing out all of the things Albertans depend on, and like termites, they hide what they do. They stay invisible.

Now, when we're talking about health care, Mr. Speaker, and we're talking about termites, you know, there are signs of a termite infestation, things you can see if you look around. You know, there's what they call mud tubes on the foundations. Termites leave a trail. They build cover for themselves to make their way into the home and into the foundation. I can tell you that the trails of this government's corruption on health care, its destruction of the health care system, are very clear.

Turkish Tylenol was where it first surfaced, when we saw how this government worked, spending tens of millions, nearly \$100 million, on contracts that benefit their friends and had no benefit at all for Albertans. All about politics, all about the facade, the image. Ultimately, destructive and wasteful. The corrupt care scandal, again involving the same individual, Mr. Sam Mraiche. Those accusations now of vast overpayments on private surgical contracts as this government tore down the health care system. They claim that they're rebuilding it now with four times the bureaucracy. You can see the trail.

Another symptom of termites, Mr. Speaker: hollow-sounding wood. You knock on it, and you hear that there's nothing there. The hollow promises from this government on health care are endless. I remember under Premier Kenney the promises that privatization was going to bring better EMS services. They had their committee. They had their task force. They ragged the puck for two years. They declared that they were going to solve the problem. The Premier came in, made one change in emergency rooms, claimed that she'd fixed everything. EMS is worse than ever, nowhere close to solving the problem. In fact, they made it worse.

They claimed they would bring shorter wait times, Mr. Speaker. They have not. Wait times are growing. Now, yeah, they'll cherry-pick a few private surgeries, you know, cataracts, a few things like that, but the fact is that cancer wait times – folks suffering from cancer are waiting longer to get their surgeries now because of this government. Another hollow promise.

Another symptom, Mr. Speaker, is sagging floors, a sign of that weakening infrastructure, of supports that are no longer able to bear the weight, stand up under the pressure. We are seeing that in our emergency rooms across this province: soaring wait times, people dying in those emergency rooms because this government is eroding the system. They are hollowing it out. They're leaving nothing there to support what Albertans need.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Again, Mr. Speaker, a government that's supposed to be a caretaker, supposed to be improving these systems is driving them to destruction. It's crumbling. Staff are exhausted. They're struggling to

keep up. Let's be clear. Our health care workers are doing everything they can to make sure Albertans get the care they need. They've been begging for help from this government for years now. No action. Hollow promises. No respect. This government is content to let the system continue to crumble on the backs of our health care workers and let Albertans down.

So the system, Mr. Speaker, like a house infested by termites, is falling apart. Now, the challenge is that if you don't look closely, you wouldn't know a house was infested by termites. It looks good from the outside. You're not going to notice until maybe you have to go inside, and then maybe you start to notice that that floor is a little soft. It's sagging in the corner. The wallpaper and the paint are starting to peel.

But it's when you really put that thing under pressure: that's when you start to see it collapse. That's truly what we're seeing, a health care system that is crumbling and collapsing, that is not able to bear the weight, is not able to support Albertans, and that, again, is because this government has hollowed it out. The fact is that, just as someone who goes into that home infested by termites and they lean on that wall and the wall crumbles and they see the truth, they see that what looked like a solid structure has been eaten away and the folks that ate it away left it full of, well, crap, that's the reality we face right now under this government, the state of our health care system. This government has been a poor steward, a terrible steward of everything they've been entrusted with on behalf of Albertans, not just neglect, Mr. Speaker, not just letting it rot, not just failing to do the maintenance; actively destroying, actively hollowing it out for the benefit of their friends and for their political gain.

And what we have in Bill 29 is more steps to hollow out that system, to destroy it, to tear it down. Bill 29 means that that system will not be available for more and more Albertans. Wait times will grow longer unless, of course, you're willing to pay out of pocket. That's the thing, Mr. Speaker. This government: they're hollowing out the system, they're destroying it, and then they are basically using that to build a parallel system, a privatized system. So if you've got money, well, then you can get your care faster. If you've got money, you can go and buy that test. If you've got money, you can get your surgery now instead of waiting two years, three years. The fact is that that is cold and heartless. It's clear that any government that would pursue this path, that would oversee this wholesale destruction of the system, in fact, participate and exacerbate it and then say the fix is, "Well, you can pay money to get out" – there's a word for that: extortion.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that Albertans deserve far, far better, but they're not going to get it from this government. No. What they get from this government is: "Well, hey, not feeling well, struggling? Well, you know, that wait in the emergency room: I'll tell you what. You can pay to go and get a test done. You can pay to go get that MRI, that ultrasound to see if you can find out what's going on because, well, that's not going to be available very quickly through the public system." But here's the problem. Once you go and get that test done, you pay for that privately, it comes back to the public system, and now those same doctors who are struggling to be able to provide care for the folks that are waiting in line have to interpret that test, have to try to make room for that.

But, of course, the government is solving that because now, hey, doctors are going to be able to work both publicly and privately. That means now that doctor – so you go and get your private test, and you go and you can pay the doctor to put you at the front of the line for him to read that test. So that individual who was struggling with their health, who needs to get that test will wait longer for that test. They will wait longer for that test to be interpreted while their

health continues to decline. More hollowing out of the system, Mr. Speaker. More destruction.

3:10

That is not the sign of a government, Mr. Speaker, that is looking out for the best for Albertans. That is a government that is looking out for itself and its friends. As I said, it's not just health care. On so many fronts with this government that is their *modus operandi*. That is their practice, and unfortunately it's Albertans that are going to have to pay for it. Bill 29 offers no real solutions. It's a path to making things even worse.

Speaking of, Mr. Speaker, those costs, I mean, Bill 11 establishes the public insurance plan as the payer of last resort. This government is saying: "Hey, Albertans, you want to make sure you get good care? You'll get your opportunity to go get better insurance." We know where that's popular. That's in America. That's an American approach. The government can talk all they like about European innovation. The Premier can take taxpayer dollars to go fly over and swan around in European countries where she's going to cherry-pick one thing and ignore all the rest. Just more hollowing out of the system, more destruction, more leaving a system that is not there for Albertans when they need it.

Albertans deserve far better, Mr. Speaker. They're not going to get it from this government, but an Alberta NDP government will get to work, and we will build our public health care system back.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

I will remind hon. members that pursuant to Standing Order 21 and Government Motion 42, agreed to on May 7, 2026, Bill 29 is subject to one further hour of consideration at second reading, following which all questions must be decided in order to conclude debate on Bill 29 at second reading. Furthermore, pursuant to Standing Order 21 the interval between division bells on all divisions required to dispose of the bill at second reading shall be three minutes. Debate will conclude at 3:59 on Bill 29 as a result.

Member Hoyle: Mr. Speaker, Albertans should be deeply concerned about the direction this UCP government is taking our health care system. This bill is not some minor technical adjustment. Bill 29 is another deliberate step towards a two-tier, American-style health care system where those with money move to the front of the line while everyone else waits longer behind them.

Albertans did not vote for that. Albertans believe in a public health care system built on medical need, not personal wealth. They believe that when you are sick, when you are scared, most vulnerable, when you need answers about your health, the question should not be: how much money do you have? The question should be: how quickly can we get you the care you need?

But this UCP government is changing that principle piece by piece, bill by bill, regulation by regulation. First, they split apart Alberta Health Services. Then they opened the door to more private delivery and dual practice under Bill 11. Now Bill 29 pushes that even further by allowing privately paid, self-referred diagnostic testing without a physician referral. This means that wealthy Albertans will be able to purchase diagnostic screening faster while everyone else remains stuck in public queue, effectively jumping the line.

The UCP can dress it up with whatever talking points they want about choice or innovation, but if two people need diagnostic imaging and one person gets access faster because they can pay out of pocket, that is not based on priority or triage need of access to care. It's two-tier, U.S.-style health care.

And the consequences of that do not stop with the people paying privately. Every technologist, every radiologist, every nurse, every health care professional working in those private clinics comes from the same limited workforce pool that our public system is already desperately struggling to hold on to. We do not have an excess of health care workers in this province. In fact, nearly 1 million Albertans still do not have access to a family doctor right now, and emergency rooms are overcrowded. Rural communities are struggling to recruit physicians. Diagnostic wait times are already way too long. And instead of stabilizing the public system, this UCP government is creating incentives to siphon staff into the for-profit sector, so the public system gets weaker while the private system grows stronger.

Bill 29 does nothing to address the real challenges of our health care system that it's facing right now. Many Albertans are suffering in extreme pain daily waiting for surgeries, and some are even dying while waiting for surgery, diagnostics, or treatment. We've seen the numerous heartbreaking stories of Albertans getting a cancer diagnosis and dying before they even get to see an oncologist. People are waiting way too long and waiting in pain. This is a result of our broken system, a system that the UCP has broken.

Alberta's New Democrats support the priorities of Albertans, who want more doctors, less waiting time in emergency departments, and shorter wait times for surgeries. We will continue to demand that every Albertan will have timely access to the best available diagnostic testing, screenings, and surgeries without having to pay out of pocket.

We know that moving towards an American-style health care has been this government's plan all along. For decades the Premier has made her position clear. Since the 1990s she has argued that health care belongs in the private sector. In 2003 she wrote an op-ed titled market-based reforms are the only real health care guarantee calling for user fees, internal markets, and private providers. In 2021 she authored a paper stating: "We can no longer afford universal social programs that are 100 per cent paid by taxpayers," and that includes health care. Yet during the 2023 election the Premier promised Albertans that "under no circumstances will any Albertan ever have to pay out-of-pocket to see their family doctor or to get the medical treatment they need." That was the so-called UCP public health care guarantee.

The government claims this bill will reduce wait times, but the evidence does not support that claim. In fact, international evidence consistently shows that expanding private-pay diagnostic systems does not meaningfully reduce public wait times because the real bottlenecks are workforce shortages, scanner capacity, and growing demand. Saskatchewan tried this model with private-pay MRI scans, and they saw that not only did public wait times not improve; in many cases they actually worsened. Again, you cannot solve a staffing shortage by splitting the same workforce between two systems.

The Alberta Medical Association has raised serious concerns here. They estimate that self-referral and private-pay diagnostics could increase downstream public system costs by approximately \$784 per diagnostic test because unnecessary scans create follow-up appointments, additional procedures, specialist consultations, repeat imaging, and strain on the public system. The AMA also estimates around 30 per cent of whole-body MRIs show some form of abnormality requiring follow-up even though only 1 or 2 per cent are clinically significant. Thousands of Albertans could receive alarming test results that ultimately turn out to be nothing serious but not before consuming enormous amounts of public health care resources and causing tremendous anxiety for patients.

And who handles these follow-ups? Publicly funded family doctors, publicly funded specialists, and public emergency departments and public hospitals. This government talks as though

private-pay diagnostics somehow operate separately from the public system. They do not. The public system still absorbs the consequences. Emergency physicians are expected to handle another 22 per cent because so many Albertans don't even have access to primary care. So not only does Bill 29 fail to solve the pressures facing health care; it may actually intensify them. Doctors are not gatekeepers, as this government has referred to them as; they are trained medical professionals exercising clinical judgment. And when patients cannot find a family doctor to interpret results, where do they go? They go to emergency departments that are already overcrowded and overburdened.

3:20

The last hospital in Edmonton was built almost 40 years ago, and since then Edmonton's population has nearly doubled. My constituency of Edmonton-South is one of the fastest growing communities in Alberta, yet we've been strung along when it comes to critically needed infrastructure. Many Albertans were relying on the long promised south Edmonton hospital, which should have opened its doors this year, but after this government wasted \$69 million of taxpayers' dollars, by the way, the UCP cancelled it, a decision that not only affects folks living in Edmonton-South but those in neighbouring rural communities as well. At the end of all of these policies are real people being gravely affected by poor decision-making.

Three extensive studies of future acute hospital bed requirements for Edmonton have been performed in recent years. All have concluded that there are not enough hospital beds to meet current needs, and this will get much worse in coming years. The study was actually done on behalf of the government of Alberta, and it showed that the Edmonton zone, with its 3,448 hospital beds, is already short 514 beds. Patients are already being crammed into hallways and with surgical delays, so I hope that this government hasn't forgotten that their own results have shown that shelving any hospital being built, especially the south Edmonton hospital, has been a grave mistake.

We know it takes approximately 5 years to build a new hospital. If shovels were in the ground today, Edmonton would not see a new hospital until 2031. When this government makes this decision based off costs alone, it's important to note that costs won't go down. Construction, materials, staffing: all of that will continue to increase.

I want to make it resoundingly clear to the members opposite that all Albertans, including residents of Edmonton-South and surrounding communities, need the south Edmonton hospital. All Albertans need access to quality public health care when and where they need it, close to home. These are basic priorities that this government should be striving for, yet all we get is broken promise after broken promise.

Albertans have every reason to be skeptical when this government claims that privatization will magically improve diagnostics because Albertans remember the DynaLife debacle. At least \$125 million was lost according to the Auditor General's review of the DynaLife situation here in this province, a horrific one, in fact. Even the Auditor General noted that important information was either heavily redacted or not fully provided during the review process. That fiasco led to massive delays, chaos in lab services, shortages of staff, and ultimately the province having to take the system back over. So after wasting \$125 million on privatization failure, this UCP government now wants Albertans to trust them with another round of privatized diagnostics.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we believe that the responsibility of government is to strengthen the public system so

Albertans never have to pull out a credit card to get timely care. The UCP did not campaign on dismantling public health care, and they did not tell Albertans that they plan to normalize private-pay diagnostics and American-style health care delivery, but that is exactly what they're doing today.

Thank you.

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

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 29, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2026. What we see in Bill 29 is yet another in a train of bills proposed by this government that is sending Alberta headlong into a world of privatized and for-profit health care, and that is not to our benefit. As in many other bills that this government has proposed, after having poked holes in our public system and created crisis after crisis, magically and unsurprisingly the UCP has managed to tease out profit opportunity from a crisis. As a surprise to no one, the profit and that benefit is not for the majority of Albertans, who are living through an affordability crisis and not able to get a family doctor, not able to get diagnostics in time, and not able to get the treatment that they need.

In another attempt to emulate the U.S., this government is making even more aggressive moves towards implementing two-tier health care, which is American-style health care, this time with diagnostic testing. At its core Bill 29 changes how Albertans access diagnostic and preventive testing by allowing self-referral to private for-profit clinics without a physician's referral, provided that the individual can pay out of pocket.

I know that they like to sell this to us as somehow an empowering measure on the surface, but when you look at this very carefully, we know that what it will do is impact equity and access to health care. It'll impact patient safety. It will impact the system capacity that we have and the integrity of our public health care system. I've said this before. You can make good choices, or you can have good choices. They like to tell us that this provides choice, but really it only provides choice for those who can pay.

It will create a burden on our public system when people jump the queue and use up public resources as a result. I know that my colleague from Calgary-Varsity talked about the many ways in which our public resources will get used up if people are able to access diagnostics without their family physician being involved and the follow-up that comes from that and the pressures that that creates for our system. Albertans who can't afford to pay will end up waiting longer, and the thing is that this government has dismantled our public health care system to a degree that they just can't afford to wait any longer. They can't afford two-tiered health care that they have to pay for, and they can't afford the long-term damage that this government has done and exacted on our health care system.

Albertans should be able to trust that they'll receive appropriate and timely care when they have a health care concern. I really believe that this, all of the moves, I think even from Bill 11, which I spoke to previously to this one, will end up being a costly experiment on many levels. Even if I wanted to be charitable and assume that all of these will be unintended consequences, what I see glaringly now with this government is that even though they didn't campaign on dismantling public health care, with each new piece of legislation the dismantling and the undermining is the point.

In terms of diagnostics, professionals who interpret and perform diagnostic tests will be increasingly drawn to higher paying private services. Again, the Member for Calgary-Varsity spoke very well to this, about where staff will be attracted, and we already have a

staffing crisis in our health care system. So what we forecast, what I can see here reading the tea leaves of all this UCP legislation, is that they'll end up reducing availability in the public system and potentially lengthening wait times.

We know that this government hasn't offered any binding guarantees that staffing levels, equipment access, or public wait times will improve as a result of this legislation. The minister even acknowledged that the details are still to be filled in. I think I'd mentioned in another bill that the devil is in the regulations and in the details of those regulations. The tests that will be included, how quality could be overseen, and how public capacity might be protected: those are all to be decided later. Legislation, again, by blank cheque. Legislating first and answering questions later and dealing with the fallout later is not at all responsible.

3:30

We can look to examples that are in our recent history. I think about the DynaLife scandal, a \$150 million privatization failure. They tried to privatize it. The system fell apart. I remember conversations with laboratory staff who were in a state of absolute chaos in their jobs. The burden that they were carrying on behalf of this government and its irresponsible policy decisions was great. I had someone who was about to go on stress leave that was in tears at the door. We had just met, but the weight of what this government had done to her in her workplace, what it had done to the patients that she was seeing in increasingly more stressful situations was really telling and had caused great uncertainty for her family. She was talking about possibly taking stress leave. Her worries, of course, anyone else's worries around affordability, around stability and job security: it was truly a sobering conversation.

Speaking of conversations, that was with one constituent who happened to be a staffperson in the system. In the conversations that I've had with constituents around American-style health care and two-tiered health care, the majority of Albertans have no interest in advancing American-style health care. I have loved ones in the U.S., and I can tell you that clearly there are people who have good jobs but who are saddled with bills relating to health care. This is not a system to emulate. It's financially crushing to get the care that you need, and the systems don't work together.

I know that we've seen the moves that this government has made to dismantle our health care, to create various ministries, to create lots of jobs for ministers in this government. I'll add that the size of the government and the number of ministers in this government I think is roughly – what? – double what it was from when the NDP was in government with not great results and, I would say, a great crisis. We are not in a better place.

Everyone that I speak to can see clearly that allowing private payment for self-referral to diagnostic and lab services is just basically queue-jumping, and it's based on the ability to pay instead of medical need. The UCP is well aware of what they're doing and that they're actively moving us from a system based on need to one based on profit motives, and that flies in the face of the Canada Health Act. Now, I know that we are living under a government that facilitates separatism, likes to focus the fights on, you know, us against Ottawa, but the Canada Health Act is, I think, a jewel globally. The motives behind the Canada Health Act in terms of equity to health care: all of that is undermined by what the UCP is doing.

They'll tell us that privately paid and self-referred diagnostic and lab services would shorten wait-lists and increase overall system capacity – we're not sure how they come to that conclusion – and that it would allow consumer choice, but I'm convinced that only one set of wait-lists will be shortened. That is the one for wealthy people and not the majority of Albertans who rely on our public

health care system. It creates a legal framework that enables for-profit medical imaging providers to offer expedited testing to wealthy folks and allows them to receive diagnoses ahead of anyone else who might be waiting in the public system.

If they want to tell me that they're going to shorten wait-lists and that they're going to increase capacity, where are all of these extra people coming from? How are they attracting them? We know that we have a staffing crisis in our health care system, and with the various moves this government has made, especially around immigration and vilification of immigrants when we know that we have some serious gaps to fill, I don't see how that's going to happen.

Now, what I will say is that Alberta's New Democrats will never support the introduction of privately paid, self-referred diagnostic and lab services that keep physicians out of the picture. I think the Member for Calgary-Varsity argued very well why this is a bad idea and the impact that this will have on our system overall. It's our responsibility as provincial legislators to make sure that we are supporting our public system well, and introducing privatization is not how we do that. It is not how we solve our health care crisis. I would say that I urge all members of this Assembly to vote against Bill 29.

Thank you.

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

Member Eremenko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Happy to stand and speak to Bill 29 today. Gosh, my colleagues already have made such very astute comments and observations on Bill 29. It's worthy of a great deal of discussion, and I think it's a topic that is of real concern for Albertans and Canadians, really. I mean, we hear across the board that health care is absolutely one of the biggest issues that people are challenged by: accessing it, getting it in a timely way, accessing it for families.

Health care in Alberta is by far the largest ministry by a country mile compared to any other ministry, and it really begs the question about the extent of the work that government has done to evaluate the effectiveness of the system as it currently is. Given the amount of money that we spend on it every single year, what has in fact been done to substantially measure outcomes and impact of the current system rather than what I certainly feel is throwing the baby out with the bathwater when it comes to the UCP choosing to privatize instead of saying, you know, "Let's take a really deep and critical look at how the system is working, how it is not working, but in doing so stand really true to our commitment to maintaining equity in a public health care system"?

I remember distinctly the election in 2023 when the Premier was seeking to form government and that there was a 90-day health care guarantee, a promise that Albertans would never have to pull out their credit card to access health care services. There were a lot of people who simply didn't believe the claim that the UCP, in their campaign platform, was actually going to fulfill that promise that we wouldn't end up having to pay for health care. It was prophetic, Mr. Speaker, because that is precisely what is happening.

I can draw up several examples just in the last couple of years where that is exactly where moves have been made precisely toward that, to paying for health care. When the UCP broke down the ministry of health into four different components, it had a real divide-and-conquer vibe about it, that if we separate this out, make it more opaque, make it more bureaucratic, not less – the minister of red tape reduction, I think, should be raising lots of alarms when it comes to the incredibly bureaucratic and top-heavy administration that has been implemented as a result of having four ministries where once there was one, four ministries for multiple health agencies. This is not

a system that has become more streamlined and easier to access. Even then academics, experts in the space, physicians, and professionals who work in it every single day, health economists, were saying: “This is the enabling legislation. This is the enabling shift that is going to help to facilitate privatization. Beware, Alberta. Beware, Canada, about what’s happening here in Alberta because that is precisely the foundation that is being built.” Unfortunately, that is what is coming to pass.

3:40

Bill 11 in 2025 is the piece of legislation that facilitated physicians to be able to operate in both public and private spaces simultaneously so they can have one foot in one and a foot in the other, again, absolutely paving the way for further privatization that, again, the Premier said on the campaign trail was not going to happen.

I think about numerous examples in my own riding of Calgary-Currie of family clinics that started to promote real concierge kind of packages that patients could pay for. You could have a free option with monthslong wait time, if you could even access a family doctor at all, or for several thousands of dollars per year you would have expedited access to a family doctor, expedited access to diagnostic opportunities, and then a whole kind of set of boutique services on the side, massage therapy and physio and the like.

That was found to be in contradiction of the Canada Health Act, and I’m glad to see that it hasn’t become more kind of normalized in our communities. It is absolutely still something that is being done and I think understandably is being pitched to families who say, like: “What do I have to do? What is it going to take for me to finally access the primary and preventative health care in the case of these kind of concierge services? What is it going to take for me to be able to access a family doctor for my family?”

The minister of primary and preventative services has said on multiple occasions that Bill 29 and some of these other pieces as well: it’s all about choice. It is to provide more choice in the system. Mr. Speaker, I fundamentally disagree with the premise that the minister can talk about choice for all Albertans when it is choice only for those who can afford it. That’s not choice. That is creating a second, private stream for the individuals who can afford it. I would even argue that I think a lot of the folks who end up accessing that stream might not necessarily be able to afford it, but they can’t afford not to.

What has been given up? What has been sacrificed to access that private service? Frankly, this government has allowed for the public system to degrade to such a point that they will sell their car, they will mortgage their home, they will, you know, take a second job at, I think, great physical and mental expense because they have no other option. That doesn’t feel like a fair choice to me. I know lots of things aren’t fair, Mr. Speaker, but I would argue that the legislation both at the federal level and at the provincial level and what we would expect of our elected officials is to do what they can to balance that playing field just a little bit.

Another example of privatization that has really gone off the rails was, of course, the DynaLife debacle, costing well north of \$100 million, and we have nothing to show for it. Actually, I’d argue that the only thing that we do have to show for it is the potential to learn some lessons, but we haven’t even done that, by the looks of it. Again, the UCP didn’t campaign on this, and I think Albertans should feel very cheated as a result. This isn’t what they signed up for when they cast their ballot for the UCP and for this Premier.

Now, government argues that private access encourages earlier screening and detection, which potentially improves health outcomes and reduces downstream treatment costs. I think that really is the bulk of Bill 29, this ability now to pay for diagnostic services. You know what also encourages early screening and

detection and what also improves health outcomes and reduces downstream treatment costs? A family doctor, Mr. Speaker. A family doctor with whom we can build a relationship, a therapeutic relationship, who we can get to know, who can understand what our baseline is and understand when there are fluctuations from that baseline. That is a relationship that is absolutely indispensable. Estimates vary around the number of Albertans who don’t have a family doctor, but it is close to 1 million people; 1 out of every 5 Albertans don’t have a family doctor.

Now, if we’re talking about campaign promises, I will use this opportunity to talk about what the Alberta NDP talked about on the campaign trail, and that was a commitment to family health teams. This is something that is growing in popularity across Canada. There are a couple of examples in Calgary that I would really encourage the members opposite to learn about because here is an exceptional opportunity to invest in prevention, to invest in primary care, but that doesn’t always rely on a family physician. Seeing this in action is incredible.

Other jurisdictions or other leaders in this space might talk about ensuring that every Canadian has a medical home, that there is a place that you can consistently rely on to be able to access health care advice. Oftentimes it’s not just health care. This is something that’s kind of interesting about the family health team model, that it is maybe specific to the needs of that specific community. If it’s perhaps one that is socioeconomically more challenged, then they may have a few social workers on board who can help navigate community services. Perhaps they have mental health supports, a psychologist or a psychiatrist on the roster. Maybe if it’s in a rural community, there’s going to be a pharmacy co-located right there, and there’s an opportunity to build a relationship with the pharmacist so that, again, you’re not needing the family doctor every single time.

What we know has been proven time and time again is that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. If we were actually meaningfully trying to tackle some of those issues around improving health outcomes and reducing downstream costs, the UCP is welcome to steal that idea around family health teams to address that backlog of people who are waiting for family doctors and actually meaningfully introduce some solutions that don’t go down this very slippery slope of privatization. It creates further inequities. It further undermines what we know about the social determinants of health. It deepens sickness, illness where it might already be prevalent because they don’t have access in the same way.

When we’re talking about the diagnostics access in Bill 29, individuals who can pay for it may very well get results. They may very well get results faster, but at the end of the day those results still need to land on the desk of a professional who can then assess them, analyze, and follow up. One, are those professionals available? Are they held liable for the findings in those tests that they never asked for but they’re now presented with and they don’t have the legal ability to look the other way?

Then my other big question for the UCP right now and for any one of the four health ministers is: assess all you want, but is there anything being done to actually address the capacity around treatment? You can have the test results, but if there’s nothing being done on the downstream side – so now you know, but you don’t have the capacity in the system to address it – well, then what? Then it feels like we’ve put ourselves in a real pickle and have added more chaos to the system, not less, which, in my mind and from my conversations with my constituents, is exactly what people are looking for, less chaos, not more. Sadly, Bill 29 is yet another brick on that pile that is making health care less and less accessible for everyday Albertans.

3:50

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to a bill that I think really needs a significant reconsideration, Bill 29, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2026. Basically, an act that will create a two-tier health care system in our province. Although I know the government has tried to say, “Well, this is going to fix the problems that everybody has been identifying since this government came into power,” and, in fact, something that this government said that they were going to fix in 90 days, we’re now seven years later. I mean, 90 days; seven years. Ah, I don’t know. Doesn’t seem awfully close in time.

What we have seen is continued pieces of legislation being introduced into this House to address health care that, honestly, just keep creating more and more confusion, chaos, inability for collaboration. It’s just another creation of another system within another system within another system. We now have four health care ministries all doing something different, not working in collaboration. We have a piece of legislation in front of us today that’s about allowing Albertans to self-refer for diagnostic treatment, potentially having to pay for that diagnostic treatment but also being able to self-refer yet not having a doctor to be able to analyze that data.

The government says: well, these are solutions. I can go and get blood work done. I can self-refer myself, go get blood work done. I can get a diagnosis report on the Alberta health app, and it will tell me a whole bunch of things about what my blood work says. I am not a medical professional. All of a sudden I’ll see something that’s abnormal. Well, what does that mean? What does that do? What do I do with that information? If I don’t have a physician to go to or, in some cases, a lovely colleague that I may work with to say, like, “What does this mean?” the information doesn’t really help an individual. What I would say it does is that it actually just creates more stress and anxiety and contributes to a whole bunch of other health care issues.

I’m not sure it’s a solution to a problem. Creating more systems for people to be able to do this yet not saying, “Well, we need to still address our emergency care centres, our acute care,” not recognizing that we have a lack of infrastructure in the province, that our population is booming at a time where we are not keeping up and we don’t have enough doctors speaks to the lack of real understanding that this government seems to have around how to fix the problem.

I believe that this is what’s believed by this government to be a populist idea. They thought that, well, if we go out and tell Albertans, “Don’t worry; you won’t have to wait in line; you can now go and self-refer yourself to go get a mammogram, to do all of those things; we’re going to fix this so that you can get to the front of the line when you feel like you need to go and get diagnostics,” sure, it sounds good. I’m sure people will access it.

But the thing is: so what? Then what happens? What happens with that information? What if a woman decides to go and do a self-referral for a mammogram and finds out that there is a lump? Where do they go? Who do they talk to? What do they do next? Is there a referral built into that diagnostic treatment that’s now been self-referred? When I go online and I look, I can go to a service and I can self-refer myself. There’s no other information on that website or on that service to tell me what would happen next. There are gaps in these solutions that the government hasn’t addressed or planned ahead on.

This is what continuously keeps happening. We keep seeing this government coming forward with pieces of legislation, with

supposed solutions with gaps. And then we know what happens. This bill will pass potentially, and then we’ll be back here again in the fall with another health care bill because they’ll be like, “Oops, we missed something in that; we have to change this piece of legislation,” or in fact, “Now that the law is passed, there’s a court challenge that does say that it’s unconstitutional and it does go against the Canada Health Act, and it is a problem, so now we have to change a word in the legislation” or “We have to do something different because we’re rushing through making these changes and not doing due diligence to figure out how to make it work.” I think that’s a problem, and I would say that we see this problem often.

I want to talk about the infrastructure piece because people do end up in emergency. They do end up in acute care. The government is saying: well, people can pay, and that’ll take the weight off of some of our centres. That’s not the case. We still need operating rooms. If people are paying for an operation, the operating room is still in a public hospital. There is no infrastructure that’s been built for private health care for that service to be provided.

What I know is that if you go from the Yellowhead of Edmonton north to my riding, between my riding, my colleague in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, and my colleague in Edmonton-Decore, we represent over 200,000 people just in our little corner of northeast Edmonton. Two hundred thousand people. Our hospital is the Royal Alex hospital. The Royal Alex hospital right now is designed and designated to respond to 500,000 Edmontonians; 500,000 Edmontonians use the Royal Alex hospital as their designated hospital site. That’s huge; 500,000 people, and 200,000 are in my neighbourhoods in northeast Edmonton.

Then you think about the announcement that the government said, “Well, we’re going to help expand on the Sherwood Park hospital,” which is fine because we need more infrastructure, but there are only, like, 50,000 people in the town of Sherwood Park in one riding. Then you think about the south side and you think about the expansion that’s happened in the south, and I know my colleagues that represent three ridings probably represent over more than 200,000 because Edmonton-Ellerslie has expanded all the way out to Leduc. Then St. Albert also takes a lot of the folks that live in my area, and they go to St. Albert because it’s faster for them to go to St. Albert and get services there than it is for them to go to the Royal Alex because the wait times are so long at the Royal Alex.

But what does the government do to solve those problems and look at the population growth and say, “Well, there are things we need to be doing”? They decide to take the hospital land in my riding in northeast Edmonton and commit it to a tower of 120 for compassionate care instead of building a hospital which has been designated on that site, that has a plan that is outlined on that site for a full hospital with emergency care, acute care, and mental health supports. There is a plan that exists. It would take off the pressure from the Royal Alex hospital in downtown Edmonton.

What’s also really interesting is that I looked at the Calgary numbers, and the busiest hospital in Calgary only is required to represent 200,000 Calgarians. That’s the busiest hospital in Calgary: 200,000 Calgarians. In Edmonton our busiest hospital is 500,000 Edmontonians. That is a huge discrepancy and inequality between the two major cities.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but Government Motion 42, agreed to on May 7, 2026, states that after one hour of debate all questions must be decided to conclude debate on Bill 29 at second reading.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:59 p.m.]

[Three minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

| | | |
|----------|-----------|----------|
| Boparai | Hoffman | Renaud |
| Ceci | Hoyle | Schmidt |
| Dach | Irwin | Shepherd |
| Eremenko | Kasawski | Sweet |
| Haji | Kayande | Tejada |
| Hayter | Miyashiro | |

Totals: For – 45 Against – 17

[Motion carried; Bill 29 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I'll call the committee to order.

Before the committee gets under way, I will remind hon. members that pursuant to Standing Order 21 and Government Motion 42, agreed to on May 7, 2026, Bill 25, An Act to Remove Politics and Ideology from Classrooms and Amend the Education Act, 2026, and Bill 28, Municipal Affairs and Housing Statutes Amendment Act, 2026, are each now subject to one hour of consideration in Committee of the Whole, following which all questions must be decided in order to conclude consideration of bills 25 and 28 in Committee of the Whole. Furthermore, pursuant to Standing Order 32(3.1) the interval between division bells on all divisions required to dispose of the bill in Committee of the Whole shall be three minutes.

Bill 25

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

The Deputy Chair: Are there any members wishing to make comments, questions, or amendments? The Member for Calgary-Klein.

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise today to speak against Bill 25, an act to remove politics and ideology from classrooms, and I will say from the outset that there is nothing in this bill that removes politics from classrooms. It is, in fact, deeply

political and ideological and represents an unprecedented overreach of ministerial power into our public education system. This legislation does not strengthen education; it weakens it. It does not support teachers; it undermines them. And it does not solve any of the real challenges facing Alberta classrooms today.

This government is legislating a problem that does not exist. Teachers in Alberta already follow a strict professional code of conduct which explicitly prohibits them from presenting one ideology over another. They are already required to present material fairly, to encourage critical thinking, and to create space for students to express diverse views. I have a lot of teachers in my life, and I know that this is – I'm also a parent of a kid that's now my last kid in the public education system, and these are experiences that are brought to me on a day-to-day basis. Teachers do this as part of their job, and they do it well, so what I don't understand is why this government is inserting itself into classrooms with heavy-handed legislation and really putting itself between teachers and parents and creating this false sort of fight between teachers and parents.

4:10

This bill doesn't solve a real issue. It creates it, and it speaks to real problems with this government. The members opposite appear to have an inability to consider different points of view. With this bill the members opposite seem to demonstrate a bit of a totalitarian impulse to ban perspectives that they might find challenging or that might upset their very narrow world view. Is it climate change that the members opposite take issue with our kids learning about?

Perhaps it's the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada that they think is ideological. That I find rich coming from a government that tells us how they stand with Indigenous folks. Important to remember that when we talk about truth and reconciliation, the key point is truth and facts, and you can't have reconciliation without the truth. This government has already shown us that neutrality can sometimes mean bothsidesing or qualifying what is appropriate to learn about when it comes to the truth of over 150 years of residential schools and the harms that they've caused intergenerationally to the people that many of us know and love and many that I'm sure they've spoken with, because they like to tell us about it.

In a province where we're seeing anti-immigrant rhetoric increasing and hate incidents that range from straight-up racism to anti-Semitism to Islamophobia, are they afraid of the threads in history that will come up that students will rightly see as connections? When they look at the injustices of the past, they'll see the connections to the world that they live in right now.

I remember the member's statement from my colleague from Calgary-Glenmore and the poignant story she told when she was telling us about explaining to her child what war is. It was a very human moment that she described in that member's statement. For many of us – those of us who are parents, grandparents, teachers, aunties, uncles – we know that those questions can spring up at any moment for a curious and an engaged kid. There's nothing wrong with that, and I trust teachers to treat those moments with the importance they deserve and with the fairness they deserve and keeping in mind what's appropriate for the kids that they're teaching, because that's part of their job, too. They know what's age appropriate.

I mean, maybe they're afraid of kids learning about gerrymandering. They're afraid of current events, what's happening in the world right now. Maybe the term "gerrymandering" strikes fear into the hearts of the members opposite.

I want to talk a little bit about what this bill implies around teachers. It implies that they could be acting unprofessionally, that

they cannot be trusted, that they're pushing ideology on students, and that's simply not true. It's disrespectful to the thousands of educators across Alberta who dedicate their lives to supporting our children. We know that with this government that disrespect is felt on a day-to-day basis by our teachers. It's something, sadly, that really weighs on most of the educators that I know. They know that this government doesn't respect them, and it's increasingly harder for them to work under this government. That's why we know that people leave the profession within the first five years.

What this bill does is that it creates fear and uncertainty. Teachers will now have to second-guess if they can talk about current events, if they can talk about history honestly, and if they can encourage debate without risking discipline. When teachers are afraid to teach, it's our kids who lose out. This bill risks silencing important conversations in classrooms, conversations that are essential for building critical thinking and engaged citizens.

It's also about power. It takes away authority from democratically elected school boards and concentrates it in the hands of the minister. I mentioned this yesterday when we were talking about Bill 28. If this government doesn't like the way that an election has gone and they don't feel that maybe in this case a board is conservative enough for their liking, they will reach their long arms of government in and impose their own ideology and politics and take away the power from the people that we elected locally. Something is deeply wrong about that.

Boards lose autonomy over superintendent appointments, requiring ministerial approval. They gain power over things like school naming. I don't know about any of the other parents in this House, but definitely as a parent – you know, I used to have two kids in the public school system. School naming decisions were not at the top of my list of priorities as a parent. They can also transfer ownership of school property to the Crown. They can transfer that where they see fit. We just talked about a health care bill where, increasingly, we're seeing moves to move from the public system and to take away from the public system and put it elsewhere. This is also not about removing ideology. It's about centralizing control. It undermines local decision-making and erodes trust in the people that Albertans elect to oversee their schools.

Just to talk a little bit about the flags, the measures around flags and symbolism in a classroom, we see measures that are symbolic but really divisive, really feeding into this culture war of the UCP's making like restricting which flags can be displayed in schools. Mr. Speaker, classrooms are very diverse places. As any teacher, education assistant, administrator will tell you, they come from different backgrounds, they come from different cultures, different countries, and different experiences. I know that I've heard the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona say that, you know, they could just admit that this is about removing pride flags, but they won't do that. Just really sort of watering down the school experience and making it an impoverished experience.

If you can't learn about the people who are in your class, if kids can't see themselves in that classroom, that's harmful. That's harmful. I don't know how they can expect kids to do well in that sort of environment. Representation matters. Inclusion matters. And instead of embracing that diversity, this government has chosen to, really, sort of squash it. It doesn't strengthen classrooms. It sends a message about who belongs and who doesn't, and I would say that that really leaves our children in a weaker place when it comes to being prepared for the world around them.

I've said this before, that intersectionality and diversity are not just buzzwords. It's how we live in the world. It's how we function as adults and as professionals. Really, I will say that this bill, in focusing in on the identity – like, I mean, they talk about identity politics a lot, and it's something that they are so fully engaged in,

and they ignore the real issues like the overcrowded classrooms, complexity, the fact that educational assistants are running from classroom to classroom, insufficient funding, lack of funding for capital for those schools, growing student needs. And I mean capital for our public systems because, you know, of course, we know that this government is also doing something unprecedented in funding capital for private schools.

These are all the issues that lead to things like the teachers' strike. Teachers were clear about needing support, needing resources, needing manageable classrooms. Instead, they are getting more rules, more pressures, more impositions, more political interference from this government. We know that 80 per cent of classrooms are dealing with medium or high complexity, tens of thousands of classrooms exceeding recommended sizes, and none of that is meaningfully addressed in this bill. You can't legislate your way out of underfunding.

4:20

I know that the members opposite like to talk a big game around record funding for this or that, but education funding has not matched inflation and population growth in ages. Our population has expanded by 20 per cent over the last five years, and they were bragging about not providing funding that matched inflation or population growth. You can't fix overcrowding with ideology, Mr. Speaker. You can't support students by imposing legislation like what we see in Bill 25. For that reason, I will not be supporting Bill 25, and I urge the members of this House to join me.

Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: Any others? The Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well, I rise to speak to Bill 25 again, the act to remove politics and ideology from classrooms. Bill 25 is presented as an effort to remove politics and ideology from Alberta's classroom, but the bill does not depoliticize education. It actually politicizes it. It similarly defines which politics are acceptable and which viewpoints are subject to government scrutiny. It does not leave that to the school boards and the local governance within our school districts. It creates ministerial-approved political boundaries while it replaces local democracy through school board trustees and through governance of the school districts with the provincial overreach.

Bill 25 claims to promote impartiality, claims to promote neutrality, yet this government itself is undermining, Mr. Chair, because the minister has to decide which flags can be displayed, the minister has to decide which school name is acceptable, and the minister has to decide which school board can express positions. That's actually not neutrality. The government cannot claim to remove ideology while prescribing some sort of ideology or narratives, what is an acceptable civic identity.

The current state – I go to schools in my riding which have quite, quite diverse student populations, which usually ask questions. They're curious when I introduce myself as an immigrant, as a Black person, as a Muslim person. They ask me questions around: how can I become an MLA? Those are kids who look like me, kids who look like the kids of my children. I do believe that children need to have equal opportunity to reach their potential, and that includes who they look up to and who can answer and how their questions are being answered.

Neutrality requires professional independence that the teachers, that the school boards should have, but the bill somehow imposes some political supervision. The key point is, Mr. Chair, that the

government is not removing politics from classrooms. It is institutionalizing its own political preference. Bill 25 claims to remove ideology while in practice it codifies a preferred ideology.

A good example here is the governance structure that we have for school boards or school districts. We have trustees who are democratically elected by their communities, who understand their communities, who are agile and responsive to the needs of their districts in terms of whether it is issues within the school or whether it is planning and prioritizing what the school can offer to the community, in fact, working very hard to work with parent councils and trying to work on turning the schools into a community hub as well. Bill 25 weakens that kind of structure.

As I said in the debate the day before yesterday or yesterday, requiring ministerial approval for superintendents actually diminishes the ability that school boards can have. School boards have only one person to hire. Once that relationship of the hiring authority and the employee that reports to the school board is diminished, the school board trustees will have a hard time in terms of working with the superintendent because there will be a parallel sort of reporting line that plays in this kind of a structure, Mr. Chair. This centralization actually undermines the ability of the school boards, school districts to work with their superintendents. It also sends a message that the government doesn't trust the school board trustees.

One thing that we should all be reminded of. As a parent who sent three kids to the public schools, I send my kids to the schools and go to work believing that they're in a safe space, that there are teachers who are dedicated to spending the whole day with them, educating them, answering their questions, and who have my trust. Public education should serve students and not only the students but the communities, and it should not become a vehicle that is used for political gain.

This bill fundamentally shifts the governance structure that we have currently for the teachers as well. They already operate under structures and systems where there are codes of conduct. They are trained to facilitate balanced discussion, they are trained to facilitate civic inquiry, and they are trained to facilitate critical thinking.

This bill, Mr. Chair, adds ambiguity around that. It discourages discussions of controversial issues. Slavery becomes ideology when it is two sides of a coin. It creates fear of professional complaints that doesn't exist now. If there is a professional issue now, there is a code of conduct that has been in use, and it has served our education system. It reduces open classroom discourse where kids can critically, with their teachers, discuss issues that are of importance, and those are issues that usually require some difficult conversations. That is where teachers come in and schools come in to help the kids. This will create a situation where teachers might avoid important conversations, not because it's ideological but because they worry what the consequences will be. The real risk that happens out of that, Mr. Chair, is that classrooms become narrower. Civic education becomes more constrained, and democratic engagement gets weakened.

4:30

Going back to the way the bill is presented, which is remove politics and ideology from classrooms, the phrase "remove ideology" implies that some ideas are political while others are neutral. Well, that is where the teachers come and help, but what we require as legislators is to equip teachers and school boards with trust and support them.

Bill 25 places that power and that ability within the government. This means that government becomes the arbiter of what is neutral and what is not, what is acceptable civic identity and what is not, what kind of educational governance is acceptable and what is not.

Bill 25 is not a neutral education bill, Mr. Chair. It is restructuring our education system. In that restructuring it expands the ministerial power. It narrows and shrinks the local governance capacity. It constrains educational independence, and it selectively regulates identity and expression. It does all of this while claiming that it removes politics. It doesn't; it codifies and repoliticizes the classrooms.

Therefore, I ask members of the House to not vote for Bill 25 as presented.

The Deputy Chair: Any other comments? The Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Happy to speak to Bill 25. Now, this bill is titled An Act to Remove Politics and Ideology from Classrooms and Amend the Education Act, 2026. This is not a bill about removing ideology and politics. This is not a bill about political neutrality. This is a bill about censorship, imposing government ideology, imposing government control.

To set a frame, Mr. Chair, let me share a little story about neutrality under this government. Recently I attended an event with one of the local African communities, an independence day celebration. I was joined there by the Member for Edmonton-Decore and a member of senior staff in the Premier's office who often attends these events with us. We each had an opportunity to speak, myself, the Member for Edmonton-Decore, the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, who did come and attend as well. After each person spoke, the emcee would say a few things about what they appreciated about that representative, you know, ourselves as MLAs, Mayor Andrew Knack, who was there.

After I spoke, Mr. Chair, the emcee specifically thanked me for my debate on Bill 13 back in December, this government's attack on diversity, equity, and inclusion. I had done some extended debate talking about what those impacts could be for members of African, Caribbean, and Black communities, particularly those who work in academia, as this individual did. He thanked me for my debate and my representation of the community and their voice.

Now, we had staff that were sitting at a table with some folks from the Premier's office, and what I was told is that they were wildly upset that this emcee thanked me for my debate on Bill 13. What I was told is that afterwards this individual from the Premier's office took that emcee aside and told him he should not be so political, tried to police what kind of speech he was allowed to give at his own community's celebration.

Mr. Chair, when this government talks about neutrality, we see from the behaviour of their own staff in the community as they try to police people's speech, as they try to tell people what they can and cannot say about what they believe in and what they support or do not support. Let me be clear. That is reprehensible behaviour. But you know what? That's similar to this bill, Bill 25, when we talk about the minister wanting to do the same thing in the classrooms, police what teachers can and cannot say in case something should happen to offend him personally or should offend what they think. [interjection] The minister has had plenty of opportunity to put his arguments on the record, disingenuous though they may be.

The fact is, Mr. Chair, that what this government is trying to do is silence people who they don't like, whose speech they don't like. Where that comes from with, I believe, this individual from the Premier's office and this minister with this bill is a place of fear. They are afraid of what they cannot control. They're afraid they can't maintain power on a level playing field. The fact is that I've spent many years building these relationships with African and Caribbean communities here in the city. Minister Madu, when he

was here, tried to break those relationships. He tried to get between us. He couldn't do it because when you show up, when you speak on behalf of the community, they remember. Now we have individuals in the Premier's office trying to do the same, trying to silence communities, trying to shut down their political participation, because they're afraid. They're afraid they can't maintain power on a level playing field.

They have to lean in, Mr. Chair, which is why we see these new provisions in Bill 25. You know, most of this is about attacking and undermining teachers, trying to erode public trust in them. What we saw is, of course, that the government made their attempt with the strike back in the fall. They went all out. They had an ad campaign. They did everything they possibly could to try to undermine teachers and attack their reputation. They thought they could win. They lost. Albertans resoundingly stood with teachers, and this government had to bring in the notwithstanding clause and strip away teachers' rights to get their way, again an act of fear, power, and control.

Now they're coming back for another round, and they're trying to further undermine the reputation of teachers in the province, a public school system as well, Mr. Chair. That's something they love to do, as I spoke of earlier. They love to attack and undermine public services, the things Albertans depend on, create competition that they fund to try to run them down. In the meantime, while they're funding the competition, they handcuff the folks in the public system and make their lives harder because, again, they can't compete on a level playing field. They have to use their power to attack and undermine.

The fact is, Mr. Chair, you know, that we had the Premier out there at her conservative conference again. We know where her priorities lie. It's not here in the province. It's not with what most Albertans are concerned with. She loves the cocktail circuit; she loves going out and doing the conferences, basking in the glow of the admiration, talking about how she's ending wokeism in the province of Alberta. I can tell you how many e-mails I've received from folks that were concerned about wokeism: zero. I've received lots of e-mails from folks concerned about overcrowded classrooms, lack of support staff, underfunded education; hundreds of those. This bill does nothing to address those.

This bill is about addressing the government's fear, this government's desire for more control and intimidation, attacking and undermining teachers in the province, our friends, families, neighbours, who are just out there trying to do the best they can in a system that's crumbling under this minister and this government.

What they do, and what they do on so many things, Mr. Chair, is they just try to stir up anger and division, empower this small fringe voice to look far louder, far bigger than it actually is, while trying to silence everyone else. That's precisely what this minister and this government are doing with this bill. They are stoking fear and division. They're making a mountain out of what's not even a molehill in order to further attack and undermine teachers. Of course, we've seen them do this again and again. They do this with public dollars to turn Albertans against Albertans.

4:40

We saw them do this with Alberta Next, Mr. Chair. Went out stomping around the province on a bunch of issues that the vast majority of Albertans did not care about, had not asked about, but they spent a whole summer and millions of dollars out there promoting it. They're trying to drive an agenda. They're trying to create a conversation. They're trying to stoke division to distract from their terrible record and the reality of the deep damage they're doing to our education system, to our health care system, frankly, to our democracy.

That is precisely what they're doing now with this referendum that they're calling in the fall, Mr. Chair. They go out and they spend all this money on this Alberta Next town hall, asking questions no Albertans were asking except for the small minority that's in the Premier's base and largely in the separatist movement, and then they say: oh, well, gee, there seemed to be a lot of conversation about this; we'd better have a referendum and ask some questions. So we're going to spend millions of dollars on that.

Again, this is not a government about removing politics and ideology; it's about a government promoting it. It's not a government trying to bring about neutrality; it's about a government putting their thumb – hey, they're putting their whole hand, their arm, their shoulder into it – on the scale. Not only are they going to spend all that money on a referendum; now they've got a website that they're spending millions on to tell Albertans how to vote in the referendum that's supposed to be about gauging Albertans' opinions.

Mr. Chair, they say that teachers are biased. They say that schools are pushing propaganda. No. That's this government. What this is about is trying to intimidate anyone who might encourage actual critical thinking, who might actually present a discussion.

Now, I understand, Mr. Chair, that there are members on that side of the House, ministers, MLAs, who truly believe the world is biased against them. They are the eternal victims. All those teachers are out there just trying to convince kids not to be Conservatives. That's their whole *raison d'être*. They'll tell you all about these Marxist and academic institutions. They've got a whole speech prepared. The fact is that it's a fantasy. It's delusion. It's conspiracy. The reality is that we have teachers out there who want to see kids learn and have better opportunities, to be prepared for life in a complex world. We have teachers who want to help kids learn how to make this a better world. Yes, there are a lot of different views on how we get there, and school is a wonderful place to have those discussions on all of those views.

This is not a government, Mr. Chair, that fosters conversation. It's not a government that actually listens to Albertans. It's a government that tells Albertans what to think or what they should or should not say, what books they should or should not read. In doing so, they have become the most authoritarian, most interventionist government we've ever seen in this province. Despite the fact that the Premier claims she's the most freedom-loving leader in Canada, her actions say otherwise.

The fact is, Mr. Chair, that despite what folks in the Premier's office might attempt, despite what the minister might be looking to pass, despite what they will continue to try to do as we get closer and closer to that next election, Albertans will not be intimidated. They will not buy propaganda. This government might not think much of Albertans' intelligence, but I do, which is why we continue to go out to meet with communities. They can hand out scrolls, they can try to look flashy, but the fact is that teachers know who genuinely supports them. Albertans see who's truly trying to fight for better education for them. The communities we go and meet with see who actually cares. Bill 25 shows who this government is, Mr. Chair, and it is not a government that cares.

Mr. Nicolaides: You should get out of Edmonton.

Mr. Shepherd: The member over there said something: I should get out of Edmonton. I do, Mr. Chair. I talked with people across the province. The minister should get out of his own head and his ideology.

Mr. Chair, the reality is that Albertans know who cares.

Mr. Nicolaidis: You said nothing about the bill.

Mr. Shepherd: I said plenty about the bill, Minister. It's a terrible bill. It's a bad bill. It's a biased bill. Bill 25 is a bill that I will be very, very happy to vote down.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, colleagues and Mr. Chair, for this opportunity to engage. Although under time limitation it is important for us to have an opportunity to be able to give some thoughts on this bill.

I specifically want to say to all members of this place, especially to the education minister: parents, students, staff, family members are all talking to us about overcrowding, about the lack of educational assistance, about compensation, about the way teachers were treated this fall when the minister and Premier forced them back to work without reaching an actual agreement, about lack of resources, around how hard it is to meet the needs of all students right now given the government's lack of focus on inclusion, particularly as it relates to cuts that the UCP implemented to PUF, and the need for new buildings and modernized buildings. I think that if you were to say to people, "The government of Alberta is bringing in an education bill, what do you want it to be on?" they would probably name at least one of those items, but the government has decided to try to create a wedge by undermining teachers and their professionalism in this legislation and implying that a bunch of things are happening in schools that are not.

I want to take a few minutes to talk about my educational journey, having grown up as the daughter of a principal and a teacher and taking the scenic route to become a teacher myself. It was in my first optional course during my Education after degree where I took Ed policy studies 360. It was a society and education course. I'd already taken assessment. I'd already taken classroom management, but that was the course when I learned about how complex the classroom I was going to be working in was and how there's no way I could connect with a student and build a relationship if I didn't understand how they came to that classroom, if I didn't have the opportunity to learn more about them and the communities that they were a part of. It was probably what the government would accuse us of being woke in terms of.

It also was the first class where the prof, Dr. Jerry Kachur – he's passed away now – said: welcome to pre-real estate; more of you will be real estate agents in 10 years than will be classroom teachers. I fear that trend is continuing and that if the government continues to push for dec credentialing, we will not be setting our staff up for success in the classroom.

This is a quote I wrote down. It's directly from the teacher quality standard document, a government of Alberta document through Alberta Education, the teaching quality standard: "Quality teaching occurs when the teacher's ongoing analysis of the context, and the teacher's decisions about which pedagogical knowledge and abilities to apply, result in optimum learning for all students." What the government is doing through this legislation is bringing in a sledgehammer to take away the ability for those teachers to use their professional expertise to be able to navigate the classroom.

The government has said a lot of things that don't actually lead to the proper outcomes that the teacher quality standing outlines. There are six of them. The first is fostering effective relationships, and the government is attempting to create a very significant chilling effect on teachers and their ability to be able to navigate those classrooms and get to know students; engaging in career-long learning; demonstrating a professional body of knowledge;

establishing inclusive learning environments; applying foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit; and lastly, adhering to legal frameworks and policies.

Now, the government often when we will propose ideas for bills or motions says: that's redundant; that's not necessary. I would say that the components within this legislation which the government argues will be beneficial are redundant and unnecessary, but there are also many pieces within this legislation that are damaging and intending to have a chilling effect, including the removal of acknowledging welcoming and diversity. I will say that Ed 360 course was absolutely about ensuring a welcoming environment. You can't ask a kid to show up and learn math if they don't know that they're safe in that school, that they can be respected in that school, and that they and their families have a place in that school.

4:50

Around the time that I was doing my BEd, more than 20 years ago now, we were spending a lot of time talking about the impacts of residential schools and making sure that all students, but also their families, had a way to feel and be celebrated within their schools. I want to take a moment to congratulate Dr. Judy Toews on a very long career serving here in Edmonton public schools and creating a very welcoming environment within her schools, amiskwaciwâskahikan being a place where all students should be able to learn in a public education system without fear that they or their families will be negatively impacted. I believe that she's retiring at the end of this year.

I also want to take a moment to touch on Dr. Ros Smith, who passed away earlier this year. I appreciate that the minister put out an acknowledgement of her contributions after her death. I want to take a few minutes to talk about why her legacy is so important. She was the first Black female principal for sure in Edmonton public and probably in Alberta schools, but I know Edmonton public from my experience there. She taught for 18 years, then was a principal for 15, and then worked for many, many more centrally. That's when I had the opportunity to work most closely with her. She was principal of some of our larger schools, and there are school leaders today who are part of her legacy. She was really proud to talk about diversity and equity and inclusion at a time when nobody knew what those concepts were or were celebrating them in our schools.

If kids don't see mirrors in their schools, if they don't see themselves reflected back, if they don't see a door opening for them to be able to achieve great things, including leadership and influencing a school culture, it's almost impossible for them to achieve their full potential. That's what public education should be about. It should be about creating opportunities where everybody's in and everybody succeeds. Through you, Mr. Chair, to the minister, when you take the word "welcoming" out of the legislation, that is clear that there is a subtext that the current government doesn't think everyone's in or that everyone should succeed.

Mr. Chair, when the Premier says that kids can earn their way out of inclusion, it is clear that there is not a desire to have everyone in, everyone welcomed, and everyone succeed, and that is heartbreaking. No matter who you are, this is our public education system. Those kids own that school as much as any of us own that school, and they deserve a right to be fully included and celebrated and to have their educational needs met.

In terms of Ros' legacy, she said in an interview a few years ago: "It's our moral responsibility to try to meet the needs of students no matter where they come from. I've left some very good leaders in the district who, to this day, see themselves as great stakeholders in the community for all students no matter what their ethnicity or diversity may be."

That is what I would hope the government would focus on: finding more ways to celebrate success and enhancing... [interjections] I'm finding the minister's use of a prop quite patronizing, Mr. Chair. I am very frustrated by this legislation and the fact that he refuses to deal with the key issues outlined by parents, by stakeholders. I'm sure he's done a lot of polling – a lot of polling – on what actual educational needs there are, and instead he comes into this place trying to push a wedge and celebrate it, and trying to mock those of us on this side who have a background in education, and who are here to try to help make our education system better. I would love to know the problems that the minister himself is trying to solve in this.

When I talked to my nephew in grade 1 about *O Canada* and we were talking about it, he's like: "Oh, I know it really well. We sing it every week." I know that, because we put that in, or it was already in probably even before I became a trustee in 2010. We have flags in front of all the schools, flags in Edmonton public for the nation, for the province, and for the Métis, and for the treaty land that we're on. Again, the government says: maybe through regulations we'll allow that.

This is ridiculous, minister. It is ridiculous to take away the rights of duly-elected school boards to be able to choose the names of their schools. This is one of the most inclusive things and team building things that happens with the school board, deciding whose legacy, who's going to be celebrated, how they're going to bring in the family members, or if that person's still alive, to be part of the opening ceremonies, how they're going to give the kids an opportunity to learn from that community leader. I remember when a school opened in Edmonton public that was named after a custodian, and how she came into that school multiple times every single year after she was retired to celebrate with those kids. It's about creating opportunities for everyone to be in and for everyone to succeed and for kids to see themselves reflected back through the leadership of their school division.

The UCP under the current Premier's leadership has spent a lot of time this session trying to do other people's jobs. They want to be able to tell librarians what materials should and should not be in their school libraries, in their public libraries. They want to tell trustees, who are locally elected, whether or not they're allowed to name a school if they like it or not.

They were really proud to take away the responsibility to bring a superintendent's contract to the minister for approval when they took that out a few years ago, and now they're putting it right back in this legislation. I'd love for the minister to actually tell people what problem he's trying to solve with that. Which contracts did he find offensive? Which trustees did he think failed in their duty to choose somebody appropriate and to hire them in an appropriate contract?

Maybe there is an opportunity for some of the pieces within this legislation to have merit, but instead the minister, through you, Mr. Chair, continues to argue about wedge issues because that's what he would rather do than actually focus on the things that can make our schools better. Taking out "welcoming" and acknowledging diversity, taking out naming abilities, taking out flags and other symbols for kids to see themselves reflected back in their school: again, mirrors and windows, mirrors and doors. Mr. Speaker, this should be the focus of the department.

The department has many expert staff within it and, instead, the minister has chosen to have his department spend time writing legislation that is villainizing teachers. The teaching quality standards that we have in this province are very good. I think it would be excellent if the minister took some opportunity to engage in his own professional development to learn about the professionalism of teachers in our school system.

This chilling effect – I want to also give a shout out to Mr. Henry Sir. If you haven't seen him yet on TikTok, he's a great Alberta comic, spent a lot of time in New York and travelling the U.S. He still does, but he came back home to Alberta. He put out a really engaging video – I think it was just this last weekend; it might have been two weekends ago – about what the impact of this legislation is on an Alberta classroom when somebody's at the front of the room trying to embrace a teachable moment.

I will say that I remember standing in a classroom and hearing a student use an incredibly offensive homophobic slur, and I knew that that was the moment to be able to have a conversation about the origins of that word and why they weren't allowed in our classroom. That was an opportunity to take that teachable moment and turn it into something that could transform the classroom culture. It wasn't in my lesson plan. It wasn't something that I reached out to a stakeholder to write. But it's those moments and trusting professionals that we should be embracing instead of bringing in this type of arrogant, detrimental legislation under the current UCP government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Chair: Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Pleasure to rise to speak to this piece of legislation, Bill 25, this afternoon.

I'll start by saying, Mr. Chair, that when a government tells you who they are, when the ministry tells you what they're really up to, we as Albertans should listen. So I'm asking Albertans to listen up.

This title of this bill for starters, Mr. Chair, sounds like something that comes out of George Orwell's 1984 novel published in 1949, a book that it sounds like a few members of the government side actually got their hands on to read before it got banned from public schools because it comes out and sounds like it's doublespeak, as George Orwell's book often recites.

An Act to Remove Politics and Ideology from Classrooms and Amend the Education Act, 2026. Now, rather than an act to remove ideology from classrooms, what it is, Mr. Chair, is an act to instill fear of retribution into the hearts of teachers, parents, students, who are instructed by this bill to think in a way that the government wants them to think rather than a bill that seeks to improve resources and address the embarrassing classroom conditions that we have right now in the province, with huge class sizes, underfunded schools, portables being built at a rapid number.

5:00

What this bill is doing is masquerading as a bill that will protect and improve the classroom discussions rather than a bill that addresses what teachers went on a historic strike to fight for, rights for their students in their classrooms. They called on the UCP to take real action to address the crisis in Alberta schools. Many of us on this side of the House, of course, were on the picket lines with Alberta teachers in cold weather, with Alberta educational assistants as well. They certainly appreciated our support. We were very, very pleased to join them in a battle against the government, who was really trying to strike fear in their hearts by telling them that they weren't valued, by telling them that if they didn't toe the line, they'd pay a price.

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

This piece of legislation is something that I think is aimed directly at the hearts of parents and students and teachers. It's a jackboot – a jackboot – ground into the soul of Alberta's teachers and parents and students who want a return to normalcy, Madam Chair, a return to a proud system of Alberta education where

individuals were at the top of their game when they were faced with challenges that they met after school, where they're prepared for the world around them, where they could take on tough subjects and debate without fear of retribution any side of any argument. This government has seen fit – at a time when parents are demanding that their children be prepared for the real world, this is what the government comes up with, an act to stifle debate in the classrooms.

Alberta teachers are super clear about what they faced and the supports they needed to help educate Alberta students. They wanted per-student funding to reach or surpass the national average. They wanted resources for classrooms. They wanted to be able to deal with the complexities in their classrooms. They wanted support to help with children who needed more support. Yet this is what they got, Madam Chair, a bill designed to restrict the ability for people to exercise their right to free speech in the classroom.

They used the notwithstanding clause to strip away the rights of these teachers to strike, to force them back to work. The morale in the realm of teachers throughout the whole province right now is in the toilet. To be forced back to work under those conditions by this minister and this government was an astounding act of irreverence and a despicable thing to have done to teachers right across the province to put them in their place.

You know, teachers who have historically touched my life are people that I've reached out to. I had fantastic teachers in my public education career. One of them was named Jacky Polowy, my grade 3-4 teacher in 1967, 59 years ago. I phoned Jacky this morning to talk to her. I asked her if she'd provide a few words about Bill 25 and allow me to read them into the record. I got an e-mail from Jackie earlier today. In Jackie's words, my grade 3-4 teacher, a long-term teacher in our public education system, she writes:

As a former teacher and school administrator, mother and grandmother of students who proudly attended Alberta schools, I am appalled at this government's piece of legislation which effectively, if passed, will impose draconian measures on classroom teachers with reference to enlightened discussions about world issues, political differences, and how to interpret past history and practice to understand the present.

Since the founding of the first schools in Alberta, supported by immigrant people who came to this land for greater opportunity, and to have a better life for themselves and their children, it has been the practice and understanding that children must be provided with the opportunity to learn how to reason and think, debate and defend a thesis, and use self-expression to form critical thinking skills which will take them on their life's journey.

Jacky continues:

Bill 25 is counter productive to this important and critical element in the education of all students in this province. As a former proud student of the Alberta Education system I implore all [members] present for this vote to please reconsider the backward thinking this bill proposes. Any one of you sitting in your elected seat, who was educated in this province, knows that the freedom to think critically, express ideas freely and to propose individual points of view was encouraged throughout your time in school, and in part got you to the place where you now sit [because of it.] You do not have the right to deny this to the classrooms of today. Please do not support this narrow thinking Bill.

Jacky Polowy, my grade 3-4 teacher in 1967, wrote that to me today in response to my request for some input from her. This, Madam Chair, is what teachers think of this piece of legislation. This is what the public feels about this piece of legislation. They know what this government is up to. When a government tells you who they are, believe them. Believe me, when I go to the doors, when I talk to the teachers, this is the response that I get from those teachers who are absolutely appalled, to use Jacky's words, that this

government is bringing forward legislation that will have such a draconian effect on free speech in the classroom.

The bill also goes on to say that it will change how superintendents are appointed by requiring ministerial approval before boards can make someone the superintendent. Madam Chair, I'm wondering if indeed certain individuals that were teachers in my life might have been qualified to become appointed as a superintendent if indeed the rules were . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Government Motion 42, agreed to on May 7, 2026, which states that after one hour of debate all questions must be decided to conclude debate on Bill 25 in Committee of the Whole, I must now put the following question.

[The voice vote indicated that the clauses of Bill 25 were agreed to]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:07 p.m.]

[Three minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

For:

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

Against:

| | | |
|----------|-----------|----------|
| Boparai | Hoffman | Renaud |
| Ceci | Hoyle | Schmidt |
| Dach | Irwin | Shepherd |
| Eremenko | Kasawski | Sweet |
| Haji | Kayande | Tejada |
| Hayter | Miyashiro | |

Totals: For – 43 Against – 17

[The clauses of Bill 25 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? That is carried.

Bill 28

Municipal Affairs and Housing Statutes Amendment Act, 2026

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to speak to Bill 28, the Municipal Affairs and Housing Statutes Amendment

Act, 2026. The bill proposes amending three different acts: first, the Municipal Government Act; secondly, the Libraries Act; and, of course, the Alberta Housing Act. [interjections]

The Chair: Shh.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Together these three statutes help shape how municipalities and our local communities grow, how local services are delivered, and how our public institutions can be trusted and governed.

This legislation is needed for a number of different reasons, and I can tell you now that Bill 28 is not about rewriting a municipal governance system in Alberta. It is about amending. It is about fixing, elevating, and continuing to see a constant renewal of municipal life and the way in which the provincial government has legislation that governs that municipal growth and the life that follows. It's about fixing pressure points in our system that have become under strain. This is inevitably the case as legislation built for one purpose needs to continue to serve in different communities and in different generations as time moves on.

Across Alberta communities are growing and housing demand is increasing. We are tackling this head-on as a province. Development processes can be slow and unpredictable. Assessment rules have not kept pace with infrastructure, how it's built today, modern technology, and the way that we have to balance the interests of continuing to grow as a province and attract investment while still making sure that municipalities end up with their fair share to deliver services that every resident and ratepayer expects to see.

Of course, the legislation responds to those pressures in an appropriate and proportionate way, updating, clarifying rules that already exist rather than introducing entirely new systems. We are working with what we have inherited here in these three acts. The structure of the bill follows five key sections. First is growth and housing; second, assessment and property tax; third, governance and accountability; fourth, municipal transparency; and, finally, public institutions.

I do have to have a short word a bit on what the bill does not do. For clarity, as we have seen through second reading, members opposite have taken some very shall we call it liberal interpretations of the legislation, and I'm happy . . . [interjections] Members opposite, don't worry. It was not Liberal in the literal partisan sense; just in the very general progressive sense.

The bill, importantly, does not remove any books from libraries when we talk about the Libraries Act. Anyone who says otherwise is not stating fact. What the bill does do is take books that are currently on the shelves if they are pornographic and sexually graphic in nature and keeps them in the libraries and puts them behind the counter, not dissimilar from what you'd see for smutty magazines in a corner store. Also, the case if something meets that threshold: it would be put behind the counter and continue to be accessible to any adult, any child aged 16 or older, or any family member of any age if they're under 16 with a parent's consent.

The bill, importantly, does not take away municipal decision-making. It does instead set out clear boundaries and responsibilities. It says that we as a province have a different role than municipalities do. The Minister of Municipal Affairs is not a competing mayor amongst other mayors in the province. Instead, the role of the provincial government is to set the grounds for the game to be played and the rules that they must follow. This is the expectation not just of the public and the voting electorate across the province but also of the constitutional order that we've inherited here in Canada.

This does not automatically transfer utilities as well. This is an important point, and I know some members very earnestly on the

other side interpret it as such. It creates a regulatory framework and allows a regulatory framework for specific circumstances where those utilities could be devolved into municipal corporations or regional municipal bodies that are able to deliver those services at a more effective local level.

These are the kinds of policies that are balanced, that are thoughtful, that are proportionate to the challenges we're facing, tackling them head-on but also looking for partnership with municipalities so they continue to grow and do their jobs at a local level while the province at our provincial level continues to set out the frameworks, the expectation, and the rules that municipalities need to follow.

Whether we're talking about municipal sunshine lists, when we talk about a code of conduct, these are things that municipalities have largely embraced wholeheartedly, knowing that transparency is good, knowing that accountability is good, and giving them the tools that they need at a local level to continue doing their job as councillors so we as a province can make sure that we do our job making sure municipalities are in every corner of this province the absolute best place in our country to live, to raise a family, to work, to play, and to retire.

Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm happy to respond to questions that come up from members opposite and looking forward to the debate that follows.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Member Miyashiro: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, since Bill 28 was introduced in this Assembly, I've spoken with many municipal councillors, mayors, Reeves, public library staff, and public library members, likely multiples more than the UCP engaged with prior to them drafting the biggest legislative overreach of municipal jurisdiction ever.

The only positive comment I heard about Bill 28 from a mayor was that they're really happy that the code of conduct was put back. However, the same mayor also said that it would have been less Wild West if the minister had developed a new code of conduct prior to eliminating the old one. So true, but obviously foresight isn't a big strength of this government.

5:20

As I recently spoke about Bill 28 at a town council meeting in southern Alberta, the UCP legislative omnibus strategy became crystal clear. The vast majority of the 350 municipalities in our province do not have the resources to follow legislative activities, nor do they have the resources to analyze most bills introduced. So, as we know, flood the zone; hope things pass by the stakeholders unchallenged. As I described the multitude of operative clauses in Bill 28 and described the downside to municipalities, that council was shocked as they were not aware of any of this.

This has been the initial response from many municipalities I've spoken with. When I provide the same information which I provided to the aforementioned council, the response is similar. The town I mentioned is located within Cardston-Siksika. I was invited to attend their council meeting because it seems that their MLA doesn't communicate with them, but I digress.

I spoke at an earlier stage of this debate and mentioned that the section on public libraries, while being the most understandable and upsetting to the public, is actually not the worst section overall in this bill for municipalities. However, because it is the most understandable and upsetting to the public, I have by far received the most negative feedback about this section. The restrictions on libraries and related draconian oversight – jeez, we use that word a lot when we describe their bills from this government – are

unnecessary as libraries in our province already had their houses in order, literally.

Libraries already had age-appropriate sections in their collection and had rules about checking out age-appropriate material. This seems to be just a power grab on a system where the province provides less than 15 per cent of the total funding. You heard that correctly: 15 per cent, not 50 per cent. Obviously, municipalities control the bulk of funding for public libraries, but naturally with the UCP government they, not the municipalities, must hold the hammer.

But don't take my word for it. I'm going to tell you about some highlights from a letter I received from a public library board. I paraphrased and I haven't identified it, so there's no retaliation for the UCP. I think this letter perfectly summarizes most of the correspondence I've received on the library issue.

We're writing to formally express our objection to Bill 28, the Municipal Affairs and Housing Statutes Amendment Act, due to its implications for public libraries and local governance in Alberta. Our municipal library is overseen by a publicly appointed board and is staffed by trained professionals who are accountable to local residents, who understand the specific needs of our community. This governance model has served Albertans well for decades and has consistently delivered trusted, accessible, and responsive public library services.

Bill 28 represents a significant shift away from Alberta's long-standing model of locally governed public libraries by centralizing decisions about access and expanding provincial oversight at the expense of local board authority. We are concerned that this shift moves authority away from municipalities and boards without evidence that the existing local governance model is failing to serve communities effectively.

Once again, there is no evidence that the existing model is failing to serve communities.

Every library board has a formal process for patrons to request reconsideration of items

in this library board, a process that has never been used in their community.

Bill 28 would have the following impacts on our library: create barriers to access. All patrons will be affected by any restrictions that are put into place even if the restriction is not directed at them. This makes it more difficult for patrons of all ages to find, access, and borrow resources.

This reduces privacy for patrons. Patron confidentiality will be at risk as there will be increased insight into patron borrowing by provincial inspectors and other library visitors.

This erodes local governance,

which I previously mentioned.

This undermines parental authority. Regulations will interrupt important conversations and decision-making processes within families regarding appropriate reading materials for their children. This will create unique, undue difficulty for all families but especially blended households, newcomers, and communities of shared caretakers.

This impedes on intellectual freedom. External regulation and monitoring of materials will have a detrimental effect on the fundamental right of Albertans to access information without restriction.

This creates funding pressures.

This is another part of this bill that creates funding pressures for not just public libraries but for municipalities in general.

As there is no additional funding provided for the implementation of these restrictions, our library will have to find a way to navigate the high costs of infrastructure renovations, creation and management of restricted sections, staffing, and staff training. This will place strain on the municipality at a time when budgets are already extremely tight.

There will be a breakdown of a relationship with the community.

This is big for this library board.

The library environment and social relations will change dramatically. Age verification, enforcement of barriers, and the process of creating and maintaining a restricted section will break down the positive relationship that library staff have built with our patrons.

If these regulations go forward, our board will be facing the following choices for implementation: convert study rooms to instead house shelving for restricted items. Implications include extensive staff time to assess over 23,000 items in the collection to determine if materials need to be reclassified or restricted. This is a drastic reduction in access to a frequently used private and quiet study space in our community. There will be workflow interruptions as staff would have to verify age, leave the front desk to gather restricted materials upon request, and continue to monitor an ever-changing restricted collection. There will be privacy concerns for individual patrons awaiting the requested materials at the front desk.

We'll have to renovate the library to physically create a barrier between the children's area and the rest of the library, and those implications again include high costs of infrastructure, staffing and circulation technology, drastic reduction of accessibility of the library, especially to families. The strict ID verification for all patrons entering the main library space is a huge concern.

Those solutions are not feasible, reasonable, affordable, or practical, so the library board urges the province to pause implementation of Bill 28 and engage directly with public libraries, library boards, and municipalities to assess whether the charges proposed in Bill 28 are necessary at all. We believe there's an opportunity for a collaborative approach, one that addresses concerns about all of the above while respecting parental responsibility, protecting privacy, and preserving the role of the locally appointed library boards.

Madam Chair, I hope the minister will take the opportunity to actually engage with public libraries and make an informed decision rather than rely on that which is purely ideological based although none of us should probably hold our breath waiting for that to occur. I hope that the minister and this government will actually talk to some municipalities about this. I have, and municipalities are not in favour of this legislation.

This legislation was not collaborative. It doesn't foster any collaboration, and what it does is that it's the government again exerting its authority on municipalities. It's doubtful that this government even asked the members of their own caucus who were former municipal councillors what they thought about this. I'm sure they were not in favour of any of this. There are zero councillors that I know, former or present, that are in favour of anything that's going on with Bill 28. Sorry. My timer is going here.

You know what I hope they do when we do the third reading of this bill? I've been talking to more municipalities over the last few days, and I'll bring a summary of the responses of the mayors and councillors that I'm talking to this week about this bill so that this House can understand that the municipal leaders in this province are not in favour of this bill. I will bring you their responses on the totality of an ill-advised piece of legislation.

Thank you very much.

5:30

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Madam Chair and to the member opposite, my critic from Lethbridge-West, for the comments. Tragically, though, the member believes that the library section is not the most upsetting part of the bill. It's what has the most public

attention. It is all that was focused on, so I think we should address this right now, directly, right away.

There are legitimate concerns around the cost of implementing the policy, and I want to hear especially from small libraries, especially from libraries that have limited infrastructure and ability to bring staff in. Many folks who are on the board are also volunteers working as administration, as librarians, and they do a huge amount of work for local programming, and I'm very, very considerate. I'm bringing in libraries on purpose both big and small, but I'm particularly attuned to that challenge around the cost that it might bring to individual libraries, especially the smaller ones. I want to make that as small as possible.

However, I would feel much better if members opposite, my critic included, were to say the obvious thing, that children having access to pornography at public taxpayer expense in safe places like libraries is a bad thing. It is harmful to children. It is harmful to families, and especially if those families aren't involved in access to that, it can have incredibly detrimental effects to the development of those children. Access to pornography over and over again has shown in the social science and the literature, in the hard, peer-reviewed data that it is negative, negative consequences in almost every measurable outcome imaginable when it comes to these kinds of hypersexualizations of children at younger and younger ages.

Yes, this sort of content is available elsewhere. That does not justify it being available in our libraries. I wish members opposite would say that. It would make all their criticisms and concerns seem legitimate to a degree. I try and find legitimate ones to bring credibility from the government side, to say we want to address them. But dismissing it as though this is censorship, to say that somehow limiting access to porn to children is some sort of constitutional right even though obscenity laws and child pornography laws have been on the books for a century-plus in our country and have never ever been a part of section 2: the claims are just outlandish.

The member asks if I've spoken to municipalities. Of course I have. I've spoken to many municipalities. Has the member opposite spoken to parents concerned about this? Normal, average parents are concerned about this. It would seem so much more reasonable for the members opposite not to get their reputation as radicals if they would admit that children having access to pornography is a bad thing, that it harms families.

We need to talk about what is happening here and what isn't. What isn't happening is some sort of downloading of costs or stripping away some sort of decision-making locally. The member opposite quoted from an individual that says that they have these policies in place, but they're also concerned about the costs that it would take to implement them. It is either the case that there is not pornography in libraries and this policy will be moot in practice because there's not a management of needing to continually monitor the collection, or there is. It's one or the other.

Families and Albertans can see that, obviously. The reason this is coming up and the reason it is popular and the reason that Albertans are concerned and do support this legislation is because they do run into circumstances around access to very questionable material in their libraries, and they'd like to see a standard, thoughtful, proportionate response. That is what this government is bringing: not banning or removing a book from a library, but saying that if it's age inappropriate, it's behind the counter and that children won't stumble upon it.

I'm very willing to engage with library boards, whether it be the coalition or individual libraries big and small, to talk about how the implementation needs to roll out properly. But, Madam Chair, I think it is beyond doomsday scenarios to take some of the concerns that members opposite are currently bringing and saying that that is

a likely outcome. The outcome here is likely that the vast majority of small libraries across the province do not have to change their collections because they have not been soliciting collections with pornographic material in it. A small number of larger libraries will have to make sure that those books are behind the counter so children do not end up wandering upon it, and they will implement largely their very sophisticated policies around privacy, age access, parental consent to conform to what is very similar in many of these libraries to the provincial standards. That is the outcome, and that is a good thing.

The fact that members opposite seem to rail on this item more than any other within the extensive list within the act about statutory studies, permitting transparency, community design codes, offset levies – we talk about reserve land, talk about aggregate pits, talk about capital reserves for lodge governance. The fact that they focus on those so much less just tells the public and, unfortunately, everyone watching and the members of this House that you truly do have an axe to grind on an ideological level with parents trying to raise their kids free of pornography in public spaces.

So I hope to goodness that this is one place we can put this to bed. If other members bring it up, I'm happy to respond to those questions. Given that was the substance of my critic's speech, I thought it was worthwhile for the government minister to really rip off that Band-Aid and dive right into what this is and what this isn't. If members opposite want to talk about other items of the bill, I want to as well. If members opposite continue to be obsessed with pornography and children and don't think this is reasonable, I will happily defend this every single day of the week all the way to the very end of session.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others?

Ms Hayter: Madam Chair, I am actually quite excited that I get to have the opportunity to rise and speak as a mom and a parent to Bill 28, the Municipal Affairs and Housing Statutes Amendment Act, 2026. I find it interesting that we've just heard about censorship, because you know what time allocation is? Censorship. I've only got now maybe eight minutes to speak to this bill because I've been censored. My constituents have been censored right now.

I find it very interesting. Last night as I was preparing for bill debate, I went through the inbox of Calgary-Edgemont. I was scrolling and scrolling and scrolling and scrolling at how many constituents were e-mailing me because they're alarmed, and they have the right to be. My inbox is blown up with concerned citizens saying: please, MLA, vote against Bill 28; we don't support it. Not one in there – not one e-mail – told me to vote for this bill.

You know what? This bill is just another example of the UCP government trying to take over control of our institutions, our communities that have always been governed locally. It is just another example of a power grab, that we keep seeing over and over and over again. We saw it in the fall when we sent the teachers back to school. They're just grabbing all the power. It gives the minister power to restrict access to library materials, appoint an inspector, and override decisions that are made by trained staff and local boards, you know, the experts. It's not a small change. It is a fundamental shift away from community-based decision-making and toward direct political control.

What Bill 28 proposes for public libraries should give every Albertan pause. But not too long because there are time allocations, so we're not really properly debating this. You know, Albertans are seeing the censorship, and with this continuation – although they may not call it a book ban, we did see a book ban this last fall in school libraries.

Public libraries are also, though, trusted institutions. They are built with equitable access to information and freedom to read by local decision-making. Bill 28 is undermining all of that. Public libraries exist to provide access to information and support learning, reflect the communities they serve. They're trusted institutions.

One of the e-mails I got last night was from Megan, a constituent. It says:

Bill 28 is not saving the children. It is not the winner you think it is. It's censorship disguised as legislation. Libraries are my safe space, just like they are for thousands of kids and former library kids. I grew up taking rhyme time, had librarians help find materials for research papers, studied for finals, wrote all senior-level thesis papers all in the public libraries.

I'm now a parent, and guess what? My parental expectation is that I'm having the conversation with my child regarding their readings. Nothing in this legislation safeguards them. I trust librarians to make the best decisions about their collections that they curate and manage. I do not trust the UCP government to do so. Respectfully, this is not the win you think it is, but kudos; you've moved the MAGA Alberta movement forward.

Thank you for that wonderful letter.

Another mom also wrote me. I think it's great, actually, after the last little bit, that these are moms that have written me.

I'm a constituent in your riding, and I am writing to express my deep fear and opposition to Bill 28, changes to the Libraries Act. This bill would be adding the following regulations, making power for the Minister of Municipal Affairs to exercise his sole discretion.

She goes on to say:

I am a parent and take my children to the library every week. I review what books they take out. My judgment is better than the minister's on what my kids should access from the library. I don't need him policing my decisions I'm making about my kids.

And I completely agree with Andrea.

5:40

I know that as a mom I have loved taking my children to the library, watching their eyes go down the aisles like saucers, trying to figure out: which book are they going to pick out, which book are they going to read? It's exciting. You know, we go get our weekly books. I know that especially my colleagues think of me as a fun mom. Like, you guys think I rock half the time, but you know what, Liz? I say no. I actually do sometimes say no to my children. There are some times that even my wonderful daughter will want to read a book, and I'll be like: no, that's not appropriate quite yet.

Member Tejada: It's between the parents.

Ms Hayter: It's between me and my daughter, but that's because I'm their parent. I don't need a government minister coming with me on my next family trip to the library.

You know, Madam Chair, my Calgary-Edgemont constituents have been clear that they want decisions about library materials to remain with the professionals, local boards, not politicians, and to trust parents. I also received a wonderful letter from Martha, another constituent who wrote me and asked me to do everything I could do to stop Bill 28. She wrote:

Libraries are too important to be left to the government. The provincial government does not belong in the community boards that make decisions about local libraries. Libraries are valuable, cultural and community resources, and they must be protected. Education is far too important to leave it in the hands of . . .

I'm not going to say the word because she didn't realize it was unparliamentary, but it describes a very extreme sort of government that lends itself to, say, banning books. I thank you, Martha, for

your letter. I'll send you a note about parliamentary language down the road.

What we're saying here is that we're looking at Bill 28 and it's restricting access. It's just restricting the access to library materials, you know, but we're also now going to be sending in library inspectors to check on the materials, the operational management, and our administration. It also doubles down on the UCP ordering school libraries to pull dozens of books off their shelves. This ministerial order contained details of what type of materials should be removed. There was a list of 200 books that were going to be pulled off, and I would say that that 200 list is now becoming probably a must-read summer reading list.

I still remember sitting on my back deck, my back porch one day, escaping. I've escaped with many of those banned books, but one of them was *The Handmaid's Tale*, and I thank Margaret Atwood for that book. It's a Canadian classic that sits proudly on one of my bookshelves. For anybody that hasn't read it, *The Handmaid's Tale* is a universe, you know, where the totalitarian Gilead regime goes further than banning those books, though. They end up burning books, along with magazines and other materials deemed immoral, to suppress information and control the population. In this the books are banned and destroyed, and it's creating censorship. In Gilead the destruction of material also takes a turn to banning women from reading. It also destroys the nonapproved literature, often burning it in public space for everybody to see.

Book bans on *The Handmaid's Tale* to this day are often driven, though, by political, religious, and social opposition to it showing, basically, women's rights, and it's unfortunate that the discussion around feminism and the extreme control over women discomforts folks.

It should be concerning that what we have here now, you know, may not be a book banning, but where is it going to go? This is how we are already violating people's rights, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the right to freedom of expression, which includes the right to receive information. Our children possess the same constitutional rights as adults, and we had this education order, and the bill violates our youth's Charter-protected rights and freedoms.

I'm also hearing, though – guess what? – from the UCP MLA's constituents. A constituent from Livingstone-Macleod CCed my office, and within it she even said that she really wanted her MLA to carefully consider the perspective of all constituents that she represents. She goes on to say regarding Bill 28:

I find the approach to be overreach. It's unnecessary. There is no evidence in my experience that public libraries are providing children with access to pornography. The UCP classification of certain books as sexually explicit appears to be a mischaracterization that creates unnecessary fear and misunderstanding.

Rather than empowering parents, this legislation shifts decision-making authority to a government determining what materials are accessible to children. In practice, this undermines parental involvement. If parents wish to guide their children's reading choices, the most effective approach is direct engagement such as accompanying them to the library, having an open conversation about what they're reading. Additionally, in the era where children can access far more explicit content online, this policy does not address the broader realities families face.

As our MLA it is your responsibility to represent the diverse views of all of your constituents, and I respectfully ask that you take these perspectives into account and advocate in a way that reflects the full range of voices in your constituency.

I thank Cahina for including me in your advocacy.

This bill raises so many concerns, and I wish I had more time to continue to debate it, but, you know, we've been time allocated and

censored. Within my censorship here I just want to say that Albertans deserve thoughtful legislation that responds to real issues, that Albertans and my constituents need to see that instead of a rushed, patchwork bill for more power concentrated in the government. We need to start looking at the priorities of Albertans, the priorities that they are raising. I'm going to continue to oppose this bill and speak out against all of this government's overreach.

The Chair: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Madam Chair. I've never heard that before. In *Hansard*, quoted May 12, 2026: I'm being censored right now. In *Hansard*. Very difficult to be censored while enjoying parliamentary privilege while speaking close to 11 minutes with another 9 remaining, of course.

I will want to substantively address some of the challenges brought up by the Member for Calgary-Edgemont. First off, the challenge that this is censorship, invoking the Charter right in section 2 and talking about how it gives us the right to information and to knowledge. As I've said in the past, obscenity laws and laws surrounding access to pornography for children have never been understood... [interjection] I would happily take your question. However, it's Committee of the Whole, so you could rise afterwards.

The Chair: Through the chair.

Mr. Williams: Pardon me. Through the chair.

That being said, the obscenity laws are protected outside of section 2. It's always been understood in our jurisprudence across the entire western world. Is it truly the idea that somehow for children it's access to information and knowledge in libraries to have cartoon descriptions of a young man being instructed to fellate a strap-on dildo, to have graphic, cartoon, explicit descriptions and depictions of oral sex and masturbation, of sex acts between teenagers, of a number of different sex toys being used, visual representations of reproductive organs, of ejaculation happening? Is this a part of the deep breadth of knowledge for four-year-olds to encounter in public libraries?

Is this what we really think – the Charter was passed in 1982 – that those who were passing it thought that this is really the heart of what they mean when they say freedom of conscience, of expression, and freedom of religion? Is that what section 2 means to members opposite? My goodness. I fear for this province or this country were members opposite ever able to govern without any check and to appoint justices to our appellate courts. That is nonsensical.

This is the centre of the problem for the member opposite's argument. No one's buying it that this is censorship. No one out in the wider world is seeing this debate and saying: yeah, putting pornography for children in libraries behind the counter before they access it is somehow some sort of giant threat, a *Handmaid's Tale* doomsday scenario. It's not happening, Madam Chair, and that is the heart of the challenge.

I want to address one more substantive issue brought up, and this one I think is really key to make, that a parent from Calgary-Edgemont that was read into the record said: my judgment is better than the minister's. I could not agree more. I don't blame that parent for not understanding. That parent is not a member of this Legislature, does not have the time to read the legislation or to follow every single press conference and to get updates from your caucus staff to understand what the legislation does, to get technical briefings from my department officials in the lead-up to the debate.

5:50

This policy, when it's finally in place in legislation and regulation, empowers parents. Another parent said from outside that riding: I'd rather that we're empowering parents. Will the Member for Calgary-Edgemont return to those constituents in her riding and in Calgary and tell them that this empowers parents, that any parent that wants access to any material for their children aged five is that parent's choice, that this does not limit in any way their access? Will the Member for Calgary-Edgemont return to those members that she has spoken to and clarify for the record that this is empowering? I would hope so. I would hope that that is the reasonable and honest thing to do. I believe every member of this Legislature is respected and understands the importance of the role and the fiduciary responsibility they have to the public and particularly those constituents who contact them to be truthful in their communication of what the policy is and isn't doing.

There are reasons to dispute the policy. You can have an abstract discussion of whether or not this is a section 2 right. You can have an abstract discussion about the role that government has in relationship to establishing municipalities with the Libraries Act. You can have concrete discussions about how this will empower or not, what the cost will be for libraries in terms of implementing it. But to just let parents think that this is somehow taking away some privilege they have in how they raise their children is categorically not the case in law being presented to this Chamber and the regulations that follow.

I really hope members opposite take seriously their job of communicating with residents. I know I do. When I'm frustrated and it would be easier to take a cheap shot at another government or members opposite or some other scapegoat, I try and be fair and honest with those individuals in my communities, to tell them: it's more complicated than that; here's the reality of what is and isn't happening.

I hope that members opposite take seriously the fact that this policy will, when it's fully enacted in regulation, empower parents categorically to always be the one deciding and not putting the government or a very well-trained librarian between parents and their children when it comes to accessing really graphic pornography.

Member Irwin: Oh, my goodness. Okay. I spoke very briefly, a minute or so, yesterday to Bill 28. I have a lot more to say. Unfortunately, I don't get a lot more time, nor do many of my colleagues, but thank goodness I get the last word, hey?

Bill 28 is a bill that has a lot of Albertans fired up and rightly so. In fact, my lovely staff Katie told me that we've gotten a whole heck of a lot of e-mails on Bill 28. You know, this is a bill that impacts all of our communities, whether on this side of the House or that side of the House, so it's an absolute shame that we don't have more time to debate it.

I want to start off where a lot of my colleagues have focused, and that is on libraries and librarians. I can say that I am just, you know, one of the biggest fans of libraries and of librarians. I grew up, like many of my colleagues, going to my local library. For me it was the library in Barrhead, Alberta, getting out piles of books every single time. Libraries are for everyone. They're one of the last few public spaces available to everyone. No matter their income, their background, whether they have a home to go home to or not, all are welcome.

Just after this bill, Bill 28, was introduced, I took the chance to visit the public libraries in my constituency, Highlands library and Sprucewood library. I brought them some treats, and I just thanked them for all that they do. You know what? They're more than just

librarians. They are social workers. They are educators. They are community builders. They work with some of the most marginalized folks and offer support and offer resources. They're on the front lines of our communities, and they deserve so much more than being targeted by this UCP government.

How are they being targeted, you ask? Well, this bill enables that minister to appoint library inspectors to inspect library materials. You heard that right. Library inspectors. I knock on a lot of doors. I talk to a lot of Albertans, not just in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood but across this province, even people who don't agree with me or don't support me. Never once have I heard someone say that their biggest issue is libraries. Never once have I heard someone say: you know, what we need in this province is library inspectors. Make it make sense.

I want to take this opportunity to quote Dave Cournoyer in his Substack, where he notes that Bill 28 attempts

to undermine the tremendous credibility and trust that Albertans have for public libraries by insinuating that librarians are allowing children to access inappropriate material and that the volunteers who sit on local library boards aren't doing what's best for their communities.

That's the crux of it. It's a targeted approach by this UCP government under the veil of, to quote the Government House Leader: "protecting our children from explicit pornographic books in public libraries. I will repeat that. This bill protects our children from explicit pornographic books in public libraries."

Here's where I need to quote Dave Cournoyer once more because he says it quite well.

Public libraries are not where young people are stumbling upon or actively looking for pornography or inappropriate sexual material.

We are living in 2026, not 1956.

Many young people have access to all the internet has to offer through their computers at home or mobile phones their parents have bought for them. It is extremely disingenuous for [this minister] to stoke a fake morality crisis about pornography without talking about the internet. If you're not talking about fixing that problem, then you're not serious about stopping young people from accessing inappropriate sexual material.

He goes on to say that what

Bill 28 does do is attempt to undermine the tremendous credibility and trust that Albertans have for public libraries by insinuating that librarians are allowing children to access inappropriate material and that the volunteers who sit on local . . . boards [somehow] aren't doing what's best for their communities.

And I'll end on this point on libraries. Just like the minister of education, who claimed, you know, that the book ban was, again, about protecting children,

it is fixing a problem that doesn't exist and tries to fabricate a moral crisis out of nothing.

I think I've made my point. I think all of my colleagues have made my point as well. Again, I've visited libraries in my riding, you know, 95th Street, 118th Avenue, in some of the most urban areas, but I've also visited places like the Didsbury public library, so I do speak from a place of talking to a whole lot of folks around this province.

I want to just quickly with the time remaining talk a little bit about some of the other troubling sections of this bill, and I could speak for hours on this bill. But for those watching at home, this is a UCP government that once again has invoked time allocation and has cut off our ability as members to speak to bills in the manner that we would like to.

Just pointing out on Bill 28 that it does make some changes to the Alberta Housing Act. I'll tell you that when I was first alerted that there was a potential housing bill coming, I was quite excited because I thought: okay; maybe this is, you know, the investments in affordable housing that are needed. Maybe it's an expansion of permanent supportive housing, the type of housing that we know saves money and saves lives. Maybe it's finally this government stepping up to support renters. Obviously, they're not willing to look at tenant protections; we've seen that multiple times from this government. But maybe, just maybe, they would increase rent supplements to the level needed.

No. None of that. Unfortunately, this bill doesn't address the major housing issues that we have in front of us. It makes some housekeeping changes to the Housing Act, makes some changes to lodges and whatnot. It's pretty disappointing as a member who represents an area where housing is one of the top issues that I hear about every single day in my constituency and as the housing shadow minister that this UCP government hasn't actually put forward in this session or in recent sessions a substantive housing bill when we know – we know – that so many Albertans are living precariously, so many Albertans are living rough on the streets, especially in the major centres, not just in the major centres but in rural communities as well.

It leads me to ask the members opposite: you know, if you're not listening to your constituents on housing, if you're not listening to them on libraries and some of the other components of Bill 28, then why are you here? There are 87 of us out of 5 million people who are elected to do this job. Why would you not come to this Chamber every day willing to represent your constituents and to speak in favour of . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but the House stands recessed until 7:30.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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