



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature  
Second Session

# Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, May 12, 2026

Day 57

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

# Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

Second Session

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## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 12, 2026

### Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, we're back.

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 28, Municipal Affairs and Housing Statutes Amendment Act, 2026, is subject to a further 14 minutes of consideration in Committee of the Whole, and Bill 29, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2026, and Bill 32, Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2026, are each 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 28, 29, and 32 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 each of these bills in Committee of the Whole shall be three minutes.

#### Bill 28 Municipal Affairs and Housing Statutes Amendment Act, 2026

**The Deputy Chair:** The Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

**Mr. Wiebe:** Mr. Chair, I move to adjourn debate on Bill 28.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

#### Bill 29 Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2026

**The Deputy Chair:** Are there any comments, questions, or amendments for Bill 29? The Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

**Ms Ganley:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak to this bill. As all members in this House will know, we are under time allocation right now. What that means is that even though, I imagine, each and every one of my colleagues would like to speak to this bill and would like to represent the significant concerns that we are hearing from Albertans and specifically constituents of ours on the record, I will do my best to speak for our caucus and to speak for those who don't have the opportunity. Limiting debate, particularly on an issue this serious, I think is incredibly problematic.

What does the bill do? It is the latest in – this is the third, maybe fourth sort of iteration of the UCP bringing in American-style health care. I'm not totally sure why each bill happens on its own. This is a government that is extremely familiar with the omnibus bill. I would say that they love the omnibus bill. I mean, when we were in government, we once put amendments to two different acts in the same bill, and – oh, my goodness – the hearing of the hair on fire. Incidentally, it was the labour code and the employment standards act, so I would say pretty related bills in those instances. This government loves to put every single bill they possibly can in to try and sort of bury the lead, to try and sneak it through. They're tiptoeing like very ineffective bad guy in a cartoon.

This is the third in the iteration of this, and I will just speak a little bit to all of the bills because they all sort of do different pieces of the same thing. We saw it done with hospitals, we saw it done with

family medicine, and now we're seeing it with diagnostic tests. There are actually some, like, very specific problems in this that have to do with the self-referral piece, but the overall impact of this increasing privatization, well, can just be stated very simply. The impact is that costs will go up and that wait times will go up. I don't know why the government wants the worst of both worlds. They've done this with insurance as well in terms of picking the highest cost and sort of lowest rights model that they could think of. In this case they have once again picked a model where it will cost more and people will get less.

On top of that, there is the issue of the rights of individuals. In Canada one of the things we are proudest of, whether we came here seven generations ago or seven months ago, is that every single person in this country can have their lives saved without drowning their family in debt. We say, "American-style health" because that is exactly what is going to happen. It is evocative of an image that the public understands, an image of people dying outside emergency rooms because they don't have the money to get in, an image of people who work hard every day of their lives, but they're not high status, and they don't have the right benefits, dying for that reason. That's what this bill is a piece of. That's what this bill aims to do.

There is very clear evidence on this, a mountain of evidence that this increases public wait times. People like to make this ridiculous argument – right? – that, you know, well, if we have a private tier, then people will go to that, and then the public system will speed up. That never happens. The public system never speeds up. This has been studied in Australia, in multiple countries in Europe. I mean, there have been studies over multiple countries across the world in the OECD, and the evidence is very consistent. More investment in public health care speeds up access. The more private delivery there is, the slower access becomes. Even if you are one of those people who is fortunate enough to be able to afford that private health care, the emergency rooms are still on the public hospitals, so if you find yourself or your child in need of emergency care, you, too, will wait. This is bad for everyone.

Mr. Chair, the thing that really galls me is that the UCP aren't even trying to save any money with this. They won't save money with this. In fact, we have a concrete example from here in Alberta. Over the objections of Alberta Health Services the UCP insisted on privatizing lab services in Calgary. Do you know what happened? My dad had to get blood work every six weeks, so I'm acutely familiar with this. No one could get an appointment. You had to wait weeks and weeks and weeks. The wait times went through the roof. In fact, some people got sicker because they weren't able to get a diagnosis. It impacted the lives of Albertans in Calgary. Ultimately, do you know what happened? The government had to take it back. They had to take it back and reverse it at a cost of \$109 million.

Think how many doctors we could buy for \$109 million, how many teachers or educational assistants we could put in classrooms for \$109 million. Instead, the UCP wasted it because they know better. They know better than Albertans. They know better than physicians. They know better than health care professionals. They know better than professors. They know better than the people who study these issues. It's arrogance, incompetence on a level that is just staggering. In this Legislature and particularly in the government there is an onus. There is a requirement. You can't just be like: whoops, I couldn't figure it out; I didn't read the evidence. You can't do that. You have a duty to the public to think about it, to reflect on it, to consider the evidence. What you have a duty not to do is to spend \$109 million making people wait longer for their tests, and some of them get sicker. That is the definition of bad governance.

Now, this particular bill has an added piece that is problematic because what it allows is self-referral. What it means is that not only is it pay to play, not only does someone with more money get to skip the queue and go ahead of someone who is sicker but has less money; it means that someone with more money can just decide to get a mystery scan to see if they might be sick and bump someone with less money. This is the worst of all possible outcomes, and actually, Mr. Chair, there's a lot of evidence that it is worse for the people involved, too.

7:40

I'm not here to make other people's choices for them. If we had a government that was massively investing in the public system, that had the time to do all of these tests, and people wanted to make their choices, maybe. Maybe. But in this context what you're getting is people who are richer but who don't need it bumping other people who do need it, and that is – well, it fundamentally runs against Canadian values because in this country we believe that we are all equal. We are all equally deserving of life and health and pursuit of our own ends, but this bill doesn't do that. It does the opposite.

I don't know, Mr. Chair. I don't like to impute motive, I don't like to conclude motive, but at a certain point, when the evidence has mounted to the point where it is crystal clear that this will benefit 1 per cent of the population, everyone else will have their health care slow down, everyone else will pay more, whether privately or in their taxes, probably both for a lot of folks, it's incredibly disturbing, and I have to say that at a certain point it's really hard to continue attributing it to just incompetence; they just don't know any better. It starts to look a little like this is intentional, that it is designed, like so many of the policies of this government, to privilege rich friends and insiders, and in this place we are meant to represent the people, all of the people.

I think the waste of taxpayer money on this should be embarrassing to this government. The function of the Auditor General in this province is to make sure that when we spend money as a province, we're achieving a result. Now, the Auditor General's budget has been significantly starved under this government because they're trying to cut off that work, and I think it's because they know that they are spending a lot of money to get little to no result in return.

This will be bad. It will impact everyone. It will make ER wait times longer, but more than that, it does nothing to address the problem. Much like the last two or three bills on this, much like their attempt to privatize lab services in Calgary, it does nothing to improve the situation, and the situation is already pretty dire. We already have people dying waiting in emergency rooms. We have a reported public case of a father a couple of years younger than I am, actually, and husband and loved one, community member who died waiting, and this has real consequences for the people in this province. The solution isn't to do more of the same. What the same has been achieving is this result. We have emergency room physicians coming forward, raising the alarm, and saying that this wasn't the only case. This wasn't the only case where someone died waiting for care because of the decisions of this government. These Albertans deserve so much better. We all deserve so much better.

Just to talk a little bit about why this doesn't speed up care, I'm going to use the hospital example because that's the one that springs to mind for most folks. The government claims that it needs to give money to friends and insiders to build private surgical facilities. Meanwhile we have public surgical facilities at the Foothills hospital, at the South Health Campus, entire floors of them, that have never been used. They have never been used because the shortage of resources is human resources. It is health care workers,

in specific, anaesthesiologists. We also have cases where surgeries have been cancelled. Surgeries in the public system have been cancelled because the anaesthesiologists were working in the private system.

That's what addition of private does. It moves the resources, it bumps people off the public list, and it slows them down. Again, these are concrete examples here in Alberta, but anyone that cares to read the evidence can see that it is very clear. It has been concluded in multiple studies, in meta-analyses, in all sorts of things that this sort of action on the part of the government will only have the effect of making wait times longer.

If the government wanted to make wait times shorter, it could do that. It could take the money it invested in things like Turkish Tylenol, for example, or the privatization of lab services in Calgary. That's probably \$200,000 between the two of them. Maybe we could invest that in physicians, in nurses. That would speed up the health care system. Maybe this government could stop wasting money on all of their pet projects. That money could certainly go to help speed up the health care system.

At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, this is a government that is very slowly bringing this in. The very slowly part is critical because they do this with a number of things, right? Well, actually, the coal mining isn't a great example because they did it, they didn't do it, they did it, they didn't do it. We got sued for a whole bunch of money because of their actions. I mean they're doing this with the provincial police force, slow rolling it in. They do this with separatism, sort of slow roll it in kind of hoping that if they just, like, pick the right moment, maybe Albertans won't notice what they're doing.

Honestly, like, I don't know. I'd be embarrassed of my work if I were them, too. I'd try to hide it if I were them, too. But here, in the place where we do the business of the public, we are public servants and we should act in the public interest. That's not what this government is doing. It just isn't. The lab privatization is only one example. We see it throughout the system, people dying, people getting sicker. The family physicians one: also massive concern. Massive concern. Essentially, someone can bump you at your family doctor because they're a paying client instead of a public client. That is extremely problematic.

There are ways to make health care more efficient. There are a lot of ways. In fact, my hon. colleague for Calgary-Varsity has proposed a lot of those ways because she works in the system, she understands the system, she speaks to other people who work in the system. She considers evidence and opinions and looks at solutions that have been implemented in other jurisdictions, and that, well, is the work of government. That is the work of government. She's doing the work of government for them. One might hope that when she brings it forward, they might listen to some of it. Well, one might hope that, but, honestly, this government has never passed a single bill or a single motion that has been proposed by the opposition. That's not typical, Mr. Chair. When I was a minister myself, I brought in three private members' bills that were brought forward by people not from within our own caucus, because a good idea is a good idea regardless of where it comes from.

With that, I think, Mr. Chair, that this government should do better. This government should do better. This bill will cost lives. It will cost money. It will hurt Albertans. It will make wait times longer. It's basically us going backwards, and we all deserve better.

Thank you.

7:50

**The Deputy Chair:** The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

**Ms Wright:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm happy to stand before the Legislature today and talk a little bit about Bill 29, which is, unfortunately, just another one of the bills from this UCP government that encourages not public health care the way that we all expect public health care to be, but for-profit, two-tier health care, this time with diagnostic testing added to the mix. We know that the UCP continue the implementation of American-style health care. I understand that the members opposite will talk about it as European-style health care, except that it isn't. Over in Europe they have more doctors per patient, more nurses per person, more surgical beds per person, and more long-term care facilities as well per person. It's a completely different system. It cannot be compared to what we have presently here today.

The problem is that with this bill, which is, of course, enabling legislation that allows all of this to happen, Mr. Chair, what it means is Albertans who cannot afford to pay will simply wait longer, and the "cannot afford to pay" number of the 5 million or so Albertans that now exist in this lovely province of ours, I would anticipate, are many more than those who can afford to pay. All of us should be able to trust that we will receive appropriate and timely care whenever we have a health concern, and it shouldn't matter what the nature of that health concern might be.

We know that Albertans – and we know this because we've heard from them time and time again, poll after poll after poll. Albertans don't want two-tier, American-style health care. They want a fully funded, publicly delivered health care system that actually works. They don't want the addition of private payment for self-referral diagnostic and lab services. They understand that to do so simply creates the ability for people to jump that queue, jump that line, based solely upon how much money they have or, quite frankly, how worried they are.

I've never forgotten meeting a fellow a number of years ago who ended – and this was a fellow who had worked very, very hard all of his life, but he didn't have a whole lot in terms of extra cash to pay because, quite frankly, he was a normal working Albertan in northern Edmonton. He didn't have a big, big bank account, but what he had was a really serious health concern. Now, I'm talking already three years ago, Mr. Chair. In that health concern he was required to get an MRI. He couldn't get one. The referral time even at that point was something like a year, but his health concern was so great that what he did was he went around to his neighbours, to his family, to his friends to scrape together – I think it was about \$600 to \$700, which to him was an awful lot of money, but he felt he had to do that, because he didn't have any choice, because to delay that test result for him could have meant a really bad health outcome.

But I've got to tell you that when I met him, he was absolutely livid. He was livid that this government would put him in that sort of a precarious position with his health. Absolutely livid. Even three years ago he recognized that the government hadn't done its job. If you recall, the Premier before our current Premier gave us a lovely health care guarantee. We know how that one turned out, and we certainly know how the present one isn't turning out.

This is also something that my constituency office hears about daily. We get phone calls and voicemails. People walk in the door, and most of the folks, Mr. Chair, are concerned about their inability to access health care in anything close to a timely manner. This matters to my constituents. This matters to Alberta. They want publicly funded, publicly delivered, and they, like all Albertans, are left to wonder, as I've mentioned two health care guarantees now: why are we getting health care guarantees that apparently are nothing more than performative? Certainly the work that has been done to divest our public health care system of all of those things that were good – regardless of the fact that, of course, things needed

fixing and things needed improving, but what we have now is not a fix and is certainly not an improvement.

This bill, Bill 29, does not uphold the values in the Canada Health Act. It certainly doesn't uphold the values that started with medicare in the 1960s, those ideas of universal and accessible access to that thing that all of us depend upon so very much. When my daughter was very, very young, she developed croup to the extent that I was really, really worried about her. I ended up taking her into the hospital, and we were triaged right away. Lots of nurses around us, doctors everywhere. We were treated right away. This was a number of years ago and this was when we were all worried, at that point, about what was happening to health care. Like, we couldn't have anticipated the situation that we would be in now.

I think about the late '90s and early 2000s when we were all rallying in front of this building. You know, we talked about the third way. We knew that it was dangerous all those years ago, decades ago, Mr. Chair, and it hasn't improved with the succession of Conservative governments because the idea is to cut and cut and cut and cut, and divest, divest, divest, destroy, destroy, destroy, because somewhere people have gotten the idea that a for-profit system is better than a public-owned system, a publicly delivered and publicly funded system. It isn't.

We hear horror stories from the United States, our neighbour to the south that the folks opposite love to talk about. I've got a person really, really close to me who was a student in Colorado a number of years ago. He and his wife were very excited, had a baby. In the end they ended up having to declare bankruptcy, Mr. Chair, because they were students. They had a bill that was many pages long and many thousands of dollars' worth of health care all because they decided they wanted to start a family. Declaring bankruptcy because you want a family is ridiculous, and this is not a unique story.

Health care debt in the United States is the top of the list for the reasons why people in the States declare bankruptcy. Like, you know, you go in and you're however old you happen to be and you get a really tough diagnosis, and you're thrust into this system that simply demands dollar after dollar after dollar from you.

We all know the situation about insurance in the United States. We know that the insurance companies in the United States are not exactly in the business to help out the people that they are supposed to be serving. They are in the for-profit business, Mr. Chair, and I very much worry that that is where we are headed. You know, it is not lost on me at all that on this evening in the middle of the week when it is National Nurses Week – yes; shout out to nurses – we are discussing a bill that just sort of puts us further along that highway. It's not a nice little road we're ambling down; it's a highway, a high-speed highway where it's going to end up with many of our citizens being in the same situation that that close friend of mine was in.

This is not something that a government that is there to serve the people should be wanting to even contemplate. What they should be doing is exactly the opposite. They should be doing everything they possibly can to ensure that that sort of system never makes its way across the border.

We've heard an awful lot about the fact that diagnostic testing can be good. Of course it's good. We've heard an awful lot about the fact that there are, indeed, people out there who have done, sort of, those full-body scan MRIs, and they, indeed, have found something that, had it not been found, would have been absolutely calamitous to their health, but we've also heard from the scientists and from the doctors, the physicians, the technologists, that the problem with that is that there's this massive incident rate – I think it's 30, 45 per cent; something like that – where they find incidentalomas or whatever it is it's called, where they find

something on that scan that actually turns out to be absolutely nothing, but in the meantime this person is worried about their health and they have to go back to a doctor to get referred to whoever else they have to get referred to, Mr. Chair.

This doesn't save that person in the end, particularly when such a high preponderance turns out to be absolutely nothing. I'm not certain about other folks in this House, but like, in my head, and I don't know why, and with apologies – I'm sure she's a lovely person – but you know folks like, oh, the different influencers down in the States, like the Kim Kardashians of the world that have all this money to throw around, they can go to all of these boutique places and get all of these specialized scans done because they can afford it. Meanwhile, again, the person down the road from them, perhaps a person who works for them, isn't able to afford basic health care in the States. We shouldn't want that for people here, Mr. Chair. We shouldn't want that for our children or grandchildren or friends or cousins or whoever they are. We shouldn't, yet it appears that's exactly what this government does.

**8:00**

One of the problems, of course, and I know that many of my colleagues have alluded to this, is that there's a real workforce issue in health care. It's a workforce issue that goes through all of the different aspects of health care. One of the places where it's quite acute is with medical radiation technologists. They released a national report in November 2025, which was incredibly illuminating, where they talk about just that, that there aren't enough of them to go around, to make something like Bill 29 actually work. They talk about the fact that there are more than 22,000 technologists working across Canada within different areas. They mention right at the very beginning of their report, and I will quote this here:

A strong, accessible, and well-supported health care system is the foundation of a thriving nation and is critical to the well-being of Canadians and the stability of communities across the country. Within this system, medical radiation technologists play a vital role.

They go on to note that there are millions of patients within the country who depend upon medical imaging every year to help guide their diagnosis, care, and, if one hopes, eventual recovery. Hundreds of thousands depend upon highly targeted radiation therapy.

They talk about it as well as being contributors. Medical imaging and radiation therapy are also contributors to the Canadian economy because they employ so many people. It isn't just about the technologists themselves; it's about, of course, all the other people in those offices.

However, that is not, Mr. Chair, the focus of their report. The focus of their report is the facts of the matter and the lack of a total number of workforce professionals, particularly when we have people jumping into these sorts of tests who are, quite frankly, regardless of what we've heard time and time again, jumping ahead of the queue because they can afford it. If you're jumping ahead of that queue, you are taking somebody else's space. That's simply the fact of the matter.

There are 30 million medical imaging exams a year. Three in 5 Canadians receive care from an MRT or sonographer every single year. They also note that the demand in exams – and this is right now without this bill in force – outpaces growth in MRTs, and the MRT growth is less than half of that growth in demand. By adding this into this bill here, we are not helping the situation at all, Mr. Chair.

They talk about the fact that there is data that they've collected over the last 10 years, and that data shows unequivocally that

there's evidence of a deep and sustained shortage of MRTs in all medical imaging and radiation therapy. There's a real problem with workforce strategy with every single province in this country.

Now, what should be happening is that the provinces should be getting together and actually working on this rather than creating bills like this, which won't do anything other than simply make things worse.

They talk about, and this is across all disciplines, workforce shortages in the 8 to 15 per cent range nationally. That doesn't count people who might be looking at retirement or people who just can't do it anymore because the hours of work are untenable, Mr. Chair. So we already have an issue of workforce shortages.

They talk in their report about how this group of professionals are consistently being asked to do more with less. We know that this is happening here. We know it's happening with cardiac pulmonologists. We know it's happening with nursing. We know it's happening with health care aides. We know it's happening with folks in some surgical specialties. It's happening throughout health care. This is a problem, and this is a problem that should be addressed. It's a problem that my colleague from Calgary just mentioned. We have suggestions for how to solve this problem, but unfortunately those suggestions aren't being entertained by the folks opposite.

In their report they talk about people having to do ridiculous amounts of hours. They say, "The measures typically imposed on the workforce," and that means a couple of things to me, Mr. Chair. It means that there simply isn't any sort of space there for someone to have someone else come in when they are at a point of burnout or when they've been doing a 12- or a 16-hour-long shift, perhaps even an overnighter because there's nobody else there who can do it. I can't imagine that sort of moral injury that folks in professions like these must feel when they know that there's, first of all, no one there to relieve them at all, but if they don't do that job because there's no one there to relieve them, then someone might not get that test that could in fact send them on the road to a healthy life, to a life.

They talk about a cycle of burnout, departures from the profession, and, as a result, rising vacancy levels throughout the country. Seventy per cent of MRT respondents now exhibit high levels of emotional exhaustion. Coming off of just a couple of weeks ago, the National Day of Mourning, this is an absolute call that health ministers should be listening to: 70 per cent of the members of the profession. It's not just about burnout. It's that whole component, as I mentioned, of moral injury because they are not able to do the job that they were trained to do. They're not able to assist the people who are already in those very, very long lines. It's unconscionable, Mr. Chair, and it shouldn't be happening, not today, not in 2026 when we know better. We know that there are solutions.

**The Deputy Chair:** The Member for Calgary-Varsity.

**Dr. Metz:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to speak to Bill 29. This bill allows self-referral for laboratory diagnostic testing. There are so many ways to discuss and approach this bill, but at a time when health care is becoming more expensive, when a shortage of health care workers limits us in getting the right care to the right people at the right time, at a time when the wellness industry, which is a multi-trillion dollar industry that is using wellness to market snake oil on the backs of a vulnerable public, this bill will make access to quality care worse. It will increase wait times, it will increase the cost of health care, and it will come with no consumer protections.

My colleague talked about Kardashians ordering whatever they want in terms of tests because they can afford it, but it's also because they're doing it because they're going to gain from that marketing and get money for it because there is no value for it.

We have seen very clearly that protecting consumers is of no interest to this government, but I'd also say that competition in health care does not work to reduce the cost of health care. Just look to the south of us in the U.S., we can see proof of that. In Canada 11.2 per cent of GDP is spent on health care; in the U.S. it's 18 per cent. That is more than 50 per cent more spent on health care than here because they have a stupid system which is actually a whole bunch of different systems. It is so expensive there that the main cause of private bankruptcy is inability to pay health care expenses. This government is adopting this American-style health care system.

This bill will create competition, but it will be for health care providers, not healthy competition like in some sectors of the economy. It will make it harder to staff MRI and CT scanners. We already see that it's impossible to keep scanners running full-time in smaller centres like Medicine Hat and Grande Prairie because recruitment to locations is not only about finding physicians; it's also about finding all the other critical members of the team, and we have critical shortages of technologists to do these kinds of tests.

I don't need to add that private diagnostic companies will set up where the largest populations are. We see that now. Where are our private MRI scanners? They're in our cities, of course. And guess what? We're not going to be seeing any of this infrastructure happening in smaller centres. It's not going to benefit people in rural Alberta. This bill, Bill 29, is going to increase wait times in the public system.

#### 8:10

We have an amazing diagnostic imaging group in all of Alberta. In Calgary alone in the past year ending in 2025, they brought in over \$31 million in grant funding. They consistently publish over 400 peer-reviewed papers every year. They innovate. They're a critical part of the world-leading stroke care in Alberta. Yet limited infrastructure, such as up to-date MRI and CT facilities and, even more important, technologists to actually operate the equipment means that public scanners can only operate from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. That's going full tilt and often with overtime. They complete the maximum number of MRI and CT scans that can be done. They're using scanners to their maximal capacity. They even outsource some public paid scans to private facilities when it's allowed by AHS, who would be paying for that; so it's in small packets.

In addition, this group investigated the use of AI to see if it could reduce the scan time of patients so they could put more patients through. They did find that knee MRI scans can be done more quickly, and they can almost double the number of patients that can be done in that time. Of note, people getting an MRI of their knee are not the terribly sick patients that need a lot of help on and off a machine and where a lot of the time isn't even the actual scan time. We don't know yet whether this technology can help get more other types of scans through, and we shouldn't be putting our hope and expectations into something that's completely unknown.

This is good. This is wonderful. This is part of the innovation that goes on. Despite this, the number of patients needing MRI and CT is increasing faster than any improvements that can come. MRI scanners in this province are too old to run this protocol in most cases, so we're not even going to be able to do this on many of our scanners. Think old technology that can't adapt and use the software.

Despite doing more CT and MRI scans, the demand has increased even more. Part of this is due to population growth, but part of it is

due to increased ordering. Between the '24-25 and '25-26 years, the population grew by 4.4 per cent but demand for CT grew by 15 to 20 per cent and for MRI by 20 to 25 per cent. Part of that is new uses that can be medically useful, but also it's in part due to "let's get a scan because they can't get access to anything else," or crowdsourcing what you do for a headache amongst your peers, and it's, like, "get a scan" so the doctor gets convinced to order an MRI scan.

Last fall there were over 100,000 Albertans waiting for an MRI scan and 73,000 waiting for a CT scan. That is without adding the impact of self-ordered diagnostics, which is going to reduce our workforce so we can't even do the number of scans that we've been doing and will increase the burden because of all these incidental findings. It's forecast that by '27-28 270,000 Albertans will be waiting for a CT scan and 135,000 will be waiting for an MRI. That's if we do not add any new capacity to do more, and that's before we think about the impact of this private-pay system.

We must carefully review which scans are needed and which are wanted so that we can assess what really needs to be done and that we have an affordable system. Offering private-pay is going to make things much, much worse. Some of these scans, even in the public system, are really because of the marketing that goes on on social media where people will say: oh, just get a scan. This is largely U.S. marketing. We don't want to be going to their cost structure.

Even without the impact of Bill 29, we know that we will need at least 500 full-time imaging professionals in Alberta over the next five years. This will get worse with private ordering of diagnostics.

We also have the challenge of aging infrastructure. I hope our Minister of Finance will realize what a big cost is coming down the pipe. As of September there were 879 pieces of public imaging equipment overdue for replacement because they were end of life or end of service. The total funding needed to do this was over \$300 million, and I say "was" because that is growing. More is aging out, and we're not getting even the difference of what ages out in a year to replace this equipment. This doesn't include any new equipment buys, just the absolutely necessary replacements.

Alberta has the lowest number of CT scanners per capita. We need 11 new CT scanners to meet the Canadian average. We have the third-lowest MRI units per capita. We need seven more just to meet the Canadian average. Of course, we need to train and hire more technicians and staff. Yet Bill 29 is going to make this problem even worse than it is before we get there. That will add all the follow-up scans of all these incidentalomas.

There's been a lot of work done over the last many years, several years, and much more is needed to guide physicians and nurse practitioners to order appropriate tests. If that much work is needed to help guide the right testing amongst NPs and physicians, if we have to add a public campaign to that, that's going to be probably impossible. This is a campaign called Choosing Wisely. Look at this on their website, [choosingwiselycanada.org](http://choosingwiselycanada.org). It's part of an international movement. The campaign aims to encourage and empower physicians to assimilate, evaluate, and implement the ever-increasing amount of evidence on current best practices to manage patients. It also supports patient education and the need to dispel the false notion that more care is better care. The goals are to improve quality of care, which is not equal to quantity.

Avoiding unnecessary tests also reduces system costs. This is what we need more of, thoughtful review of how care is delivered, decisions on which tests bring value, decisions on how often a test needs to be repeated, and exactly which test to do.

I could give you more on this, but I'm going to cede the rest of my time to my colleagues.

**The Deputy Chair:** The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

**Mr. Gurtej Brar:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. When any Albertan is sick, the first question should never be: how much money do you have? The first question should be: what care do you need? That is the heart of public health care. That is what Albertans believe in, and that is what Bill 29 puts at risk. That's why I and my colleagues from this side of the House strongly oppose this bill.

Mr. Chair, this government says that Bill 29 is about choice. For a family struggling to pay rent or buying groceries, choice does not mean paying out of pocket for a scan. For a senior on a fixed income choice does not mean putting a medical test on a credit card. For a young person without a family doctor, choice does not mean searching symptoms online, getting scared, and then paying a private clinic because the public system is too slow. That is not a choice. That is fear, and that is pressure. That is government telling Albertans: if you are worried and if you can pay, you can move faster.

8:20

Mr. Chair, health care should be based on need, not wealth. Your place in the line should not depend on your bank account. Your diagnosis should not depend on your credit limit. Bill 29 opens the door to private-pay diagnostics without a doctor's referral. That means some people can pay to get tests faster and everyone else will wait. The government can call this access. The government can call this innovation. They can call this prevention, but Albertans know what this is. It is pay-to-skip health care, and pay-to-skip health care has no place in Alberta.

This bill also removes something very important from the process. It removes medical judgment. Right now diagnostic testing is guided by a doctor, a nurse practitioner, or another trained health provider. That is not gatekeeping. That is care. That is someone asking questions. That is someone looking for a symptom. That is someone checking medical history. That is someone deciding what test is needed and what test is not needed and what test needs follow-up.

Doctors do not order tests to block people; they order tests to protect people, and that matters because more testing is not always better care. Sometimes more testing creates more fears, and sometimes a scan finds something small that means nothing. Sometimes it leads to more tests, more appointments, more stress, and more waiting. Sometimes patients are harmed by chasing problems that were never really a problem in the first place.

Mr. Chair, we also have to talk about the world people live in today. People are scared. People are stressed. Many Albertans cannot get quick medical advice as almost a million Albertans do not have a family doctor, so what do they do? They go online. They search for the symptoms. They scroll social media, and uncontrolled social media does not calm people down; it often scares them more. A person may have stomach pain because of stress or something they ate, but they search it online and within minutes they are told it could be a cancer, organ failure, or life-threatening emergency. A person may have a headache because they're tired or dehydrated, but social media tells them it could be a brain tumour. A person may feel chest congestion because of anxiety, but the algorithm pushed the scariest possible explanation.

Social media does not know the patient. It doesn't know the patient history. It does not examine them. It does not ask proper questions. It does not use medical judgment. It pushes fear because fear gets the click. Fear keeps people watching. Fear keeps people scrolling, and fear can sell tests.

Bill 29 takes that fear and turns it into the market. That bill says to worried Albertans: if you are scared enough and if you have

enough money, you can buy a test. That is dangerous, and that is not prevention. That is private companies profiting from people's worst worries.

Mr. Chair, we should not build a health care system around panic. We should not let the Internet drive medical decisions. We should not replace a family doctor with an algorithm. Albertans need trusted care. They need someone to listen. They need someone to ask a question. They need someone to explain what is serious and what is not, but instead of giving Albertans access to doctors, this government is giving them a private payment option. Instead of fixing the public system, this government is creating a side door, and that side door will open first to who can pay.

What happens when someone pays for a private test? What happens if the result is unclear? What happens if it shows something that may or may not matter? What happens if the person is scared and needs answers? That comes back to the public system. They need a family doctor, they need a specialist, they need more testing, and they may go to the emergency room. We all know the public system is stretched thin already. Emergency rooms are full, family doctors are hard to find, specialists have long wait times, health care workers are exhausted, so who carries that burden? The public system. Who pays the cost? Albertans. Who waits longer? The other patients. Those really need care right away. That is not a solution. That is shifting a problem, and that is taking fear from the private market and dumping that follow-up back onto the public system.

Mr. Chair, the Alberta Medical Association has raised serious concerns about this kind of private-pay, self-referral model. They estimate that Bill 29 briefing also could add up around 784 bucks in public-system costs for each diagnostic test, and many positive findings would still need a follow-up in the public system. So let us say this plainly: the private clinics will get paid, the public system gets the pressure, the patient gets the fear, and everyone will get the longer wait time. That is a bad deal for Albertans.

This bill also ignores the biggest problem in our health care system, that we do not have enough workers. There is no secret second workforce. There is no extra group of medical technologists sitting around. There is no spare team of radiologists waiting for private clinics. There is no extra army of nurses, lab workers, and health professionals ready to appear overnight. These are the same workers, the same skilled people, the same people in our hospital need. If private clinics offer better hours, less pressure, more money, what does the government think will happen? Workers will be pulled away from our public system. When workers leave the public system, public waits are going to get worse. You cannot fix a shortage by creating more competition in the same workforce. You cannot strengthen public health care by draining it.

Mr. Chair, Albertans have seen this before. They remember DynaLife. They remember the promises. They were told privatization would make things better, but the lab services were thrown into chaos. Patients waited, workers struggled, and public money was wasted. Albertans know that at least \$125 million was lost into the DynaLife failed contract. That should have been a lesson for this government. Instead, they are again backing another privatization scheme, another experiment, another bill that puts ideology ahead of patients.

8:30

Albertans are tired of being test subjects for this government's private health care agenda. They want a family doctor. They want faster public MRIs and CT scans.

**The Deputy Chair:** I hesitate to interrupt, hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, 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 consideration of Bill 29 in Committee of the Whole, I must now put the following questions to conclude debate.

[The clauses of Bill 29 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Deputy Chair:** Any opposed? That is carried.

**Bill 28**  
**Municipal Affairs and Housing Statutes**  
**Amendment Act, 2026**  
*(continued)*

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, we return to Bill 28, Municipal Affairs and Housing Statutes Amendment Act, 2026. We have 14 minutes of time left on Bill 28. The Minister of Municipal Affairs has resumed.

**Mr. Williams:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm happy to rise again on Bill 28 in the lively debate we're having.

I think the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was speaking just before the break, and I'd like to respond to some of the questions and comments that were brought up by the member. I appreciate that the member has a real passion when it comes to housing affordability, especially nonmarket housing, when it comes to housing foundations and other work that happens largely in assisted living. That being said, there is a market connection as well to this, and though it isn't a money bill – so the member, I think tongue-in-cheek, was saying that maybe this is the bill that will fund more of the projects that she's interested in. It will in an indirect way, though not through funding, have an effect on the entire housing market.

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

First, it has an effect, obviously, on the market side when we see a reduction of red tape and needless added cost, which ends up being cost downloaded onto the end user. That's a reality we have to accept when it comes to the market; when you add cost to a developer and a builder at any point in the process, because of the way the market works, it is downloaded and it is fundamentally something that gets passed on to the end user. Those are Albertans buying, living in homes. Rent is escalated. As it works its way through the market, it also has an effect on those folks that may or may not be able to, at any given moment, be on the bubble when it comes to being able to afford market housing. Social housing and different programs that we offer in the government to help support those who are struggling in terms of accommodation are affected as well by this legislation in a positive way.

I'm happy to say that we are making steps forward on automatic yes for permitting that cities like the city of Edmonton are already using. There's already work being done – pardon me. That's AI, I should say, along with some automatic yes as well for low-risk development permits that municipalities will be able to use and creates the framework and guidelines for them.

However, Madam Chair, there were other substantive issues brought up as well by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, and she focused many of her comments on Bill 28 on the piece surrounding public libraries and the amendments to the

Libraries Act. She quoted this from a well-known Alberta podcaster, public commentator with a blog, a gentleman named Dave Cournoyer.

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.

Very clever line.

Many young people have access to all the internet has to offer through their computers at home or mobile phones [et cetera] . . .

It is extremely disingenuous

he continues,

for [Minister] Williams to stoke a fake morality crisis about pornography without talking about the internet.

So let me talk about the Internet. We hear often the refrain from members opposite in the public and as well on this side of the House that libraries should be and are safe spaces; they might be the last safe space. We hear that articulated here by the same author.

Because [libraries] are for everyone, local public libraries are also one of the few welcoming . . . spaces open to some of our most vulnerable.

He continues.

Public libraries are probably one of the last truly public spaces we have in our communities.

Madam Chair, what is the proposal? That we reduce libraries to the state of the Internet for parents? Is this really the policy option on the other side? Because the Internet sucks and is not a safe place for children, which it surely isn't, we also should not consider libraries? As long as there's one evil in the world, it might as well be widespread across every aspect of a public space? This is an insane, nonsensical argument that because some children have access to the Internet and they use it without parental guidance, we should also have no parental guidance, no responsibility, no protection for vulnerable children in our libraries, the one place, one of the very few local libraries, one of the few welcoming spaces open to some society. If your bar is the Internet, it's the lowest possible place. It is on the floor for what you think is appropriate for children.

I think the arguments that they continue advancing on the libraries piece are insane. They're borderline political malpractice. Their residents and their ratepayers, the people that they represent, want nothing to do with this insane position. I promise you that the flyers sent out come election season won't say: "We will re-introduce porn into every library. We want to return libraries to the state of safeness that the Internet is for children."

This is not the position. I hate to return to this all the time. This is a balanced, proportionate, reasonable approach. The members opposite are the ones that are obsessed with making sure that the rules don't come into place that would prohibit libraries from carelessly, often accidentally, exposing children to pornography. What other argument is there, other than saying that parents get the final say, as we're proposing here in government, and that if you're 16 or older, you can have access to these materials. Until then, they're not removed, they're not banned; they're placed behind a counter, just like a magazine at a corner store.

It's crazy that they continue to advance this and call it censorship. To have that argument played out to its logical end, you must also oppose child pornography laws in Canada and the Criminal Code as censorship, just the same. It makes no sense, Madam Chair. I ask members opposite to please touch grass, return to reality, and just admit that porn is bad for children. And have a policy debate about how much this will cost. Let's make sure the regs are right. Let's make sure that we're engaging with libraries to understand the goals of government here, not to try and have the most fallacious arguments possible in an attempt to try and stoke fear and look at

these posts that somehow in the same breath say that libraries are one of the few safe spaces we have left, while at the same time, because kids have access to the Internet, we should degrade libraries to the same state of affairs.

I don't know. I thank goodness. I do. I thank God that we have a majority government right now, and I implore all of my members on our side to make sure we show up to vote soon in Committee of the Whole to pass Bill 28 on to third reading.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Other members that wish to join?

The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

**Dr. Elmeligi:** Thank you, Madam Chair. It is my privileged opportunity to speak to this garbage piece of legislation. Yeah. No surprise. I'm pretty opposed to it. And while I appreciate all of the minister's previous comments, I have quite a few of my own.

8:40

Overall this bill will risk duplicating existing processes and limiting municipalities' ability to deliver services effectively and responsibly to local needs. I don't actually think the province is equipped for this level of overreach either. The Municipal Overreach Act of 2026 creates a lot more responsibility for the minister, and I'm not quite sure that the ministry is ready for that amount of work. It creates a ton of red tape for municipalities to work around. Ultimately, I read this bill and I ask myself: why do we have a municipal government? Why do we elect municipal councillors if this government can just create a bill that basically strips all of their responsibilities away? The provincial oversight in municipal planning and development constrains local planning processes and imposes uniform standards across diverse municipalities. This government talks all the time about rural representation, yet it wants to create blanket design standards and codes decided in the minister's office instead of in the individual municipality.

Really, my biggest problems with this bill, Madam Chair, are really around the differential property taxation on municipalities, which is a huge problem for my hometown of Canmore. Over the last few years several ministers have told me: let me tell you the thing about Canmore. I want to now take the floor and say: let me tell you the thing about Canmore. I don't need my hometown mansplained to me, so I'm going to take this opportunity to tell it like it is. Canmore's livability tax is a program that the town council was forced to explore because of this government's absolute failure to provide any funding for tourism-related infrastructure or affordable housing. Having the provincial law target one specific municipality is just awful. You're changing provincial law to target one town.

This isn't the first time that Canmore has specifically been targeted by a provincial government in the MGA. I've got to be honest with you, Madam Chair. Canmorites are tired of being told how to live their lives and how to plan and structure their community because of a provincial government that just looks at our town as a cash cow instead of a town with real people living in it, working real lives, and trying to live their lives as sustainably as possible. Canmore is so much more than a cash cow, and this government needs to wake up and recognize that. We do not need the provincial government overreaching into municipal decision-making.

Let me tell you a little bit about Canmore. Canmore is a population of 17,000 people. It has grown a lot in the 20 years that I've lived there, and that growth is visible every single day. The town is changing rapidly, and it is causing all kinds of challenges

and issues for the residents there. For a town of 17,000 people we serve 4 to 5 million visitors a year. We don't have infrastructure for 4 to 5 million visitors a year, Madam Chair. We have to build it and create it, and the province doesn't help with that. Canmore and Banff generate over \$1.2 billion a year for the provincial economy – you're welcome – and all of that is on a rural municipality budget.

Hosting the world is an incredible privilege, Madam Chair, but it is also very expensive. We need tourism-related infrastructure to ensure high-quality visitor experiences. We need affordable housing for the thousands of people working in tourism, and we also need affordable housing for the many people who come to our town to try to build a life in our community. This government doesn't want to recognize that because this government looks at the town of Canmore and just sees dollar signs. It doesn't see the community filled with hard-working Albertans serving the world. In doing so, this government has made decisions that have made life harder for people in Canmore.

The first thing this government did under this current session of Legislature is that they rejected my motion for a tourism-based economy designation, which would provide funding much needed for tourism-related infrastructure. They've also increased property taxes through the education tax. I find it offensive every time this government stands up and talks about cutting tax. It's a total farce.

They've increased property taxes with the education tax. They refuse to provide additional funding to build affordable housing. All of these rejections and funding refusals are compounded by this government's downloading of \$20 million of costs onto the municipal budget. [interjections] Yes, that's right: \$20 million for things like hand counting election ballots, traffic reporting, enforcing provincial legislation on weed control and pest control; \$100 million for upgrading our new water treatment plant because provincial regulations changed, public safety, river rescue, wildlife management, houselessness, and, of course, housing. Canmore has a thriving economy, but all of these things are additional costs, and all of these costs are significant, and they all come from a rural municipal budget.

All the while we have a housing crisis, young people living in their vehicles literally behind the Safeway, young families leaving town because they can't afford child care and a yard. They can't get a dog because they don't have a yard, or they can't pay rent. They can't have kids. They're working two to three jobs. It's ridiculous, Madam Chair. How are we supposed to build a community if nobody can afford to stay in it?

And this government does nothing except blame the municipality and take funding away after . . .

**Mr. Schow:** And cut taxes.

**Dr. Elmeligi:** No. Increasing taxes with the education tax, thank you very much.

After considering and implementing a variety of options, Canmore town council landed on this livability tax. It was not their first choice. It was the last resort. It was the only thing, the only way that they could see to raise money for affordable housing and deal with all of the downloaded costs put on them by this government, a higher property tax on nonresident homeowners. Nobody wants to do this, Madam Chair. It is a last resort of the council.

A quarter of the properties in Canmore are not occupied full-time. It is a challenge that we deal with in our town. The livability tax was projected to raise \$10.3 million in 2026, and all of that was going to . . .

**The Chair:** Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Government Motion 42, agreed to on May 7, which states that after

one hour of debate all questions must be decided to conclude debate on Bill 28 in Committee of the Whole, I must now put the following question.

[The voice vote indicated that the clauses of Bill 28 were agreed to]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:47 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	Lunty	Stephan
Dreeshen	McDougall	Turton
Dyck	Nally	van Dijken
Ellis	Neudorf	Wiebe
Fir	Nicolaides	Williams
Getson	Nixon	Wilson
Glubish	Petrovic	Wright, J.
Horner	Rowswell	Yao
Hunter	Sawhney	Yaseen
Jean	Sawyer	

Against:

Al-Guneid	Deol	Ip
Batten	Eggen	Metz
Brar, Gurinder	Ellingson	Pancholi
Brar, Gurtej	Elmeligi	Wright, P.
Chapman	Ganley	

Totals: For – 44 Against – 14

[The clauses of Bill 28 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Any opposed? Carried.

**Bill 32**

**Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2026**

**The Chair:** I am seeking members who wish to speak to the bill. The hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia.

**Member Batten:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to join debate on Bill 32, the boundaries commission, in Committee of the Whole. I wanted to first start by acknowledging the prior contributions from our side that have really spoken to Alberta’s values and to Alberta’s priorities. It really resonates with what I’m hearing in my constituency, so that really that makes this debate a little bit easier because I don’t have to repeat what they’ve shared before.

What I do want to reinforce is that Albertans know what fairness looks like because it’s what most of us had learned as children. Children understand that you do not change the rules halfway through a game just because you don’t like how the score is looking. As elected officials inside this Legislature we are here to serve Albertans. Democracy only works when people trust the rules: that rules are fair, that they are transparent, that they are being applied

equally to everyone, and that they aren’t being influenced or rewritten for political or personal gain. That’s why Albertans are paying really close attention to bills like Bill 32. They know what fairness looks like, and they know when something does not feel right. Now, Albertans can handle losing fairly, but what they cannot tolerate is the feeling that someone in power is changing the rules to win.

In that we’re starting kind of fresh on this bill tonight, I want to make sure that a few facts are on the table. Now, our beautiful province is growing. There is no question. We live in, well, one of the best provinces in Canada, and as part of Canada being one of the best countries in this world. We’re incredibly, incredibly fortunate to call this place home.

Now, the boundaries commission is set up so that every eight to 10 years we can take a look at the maps and we can adjust, and when I say “we,” I mean Albertans. I mean through a prescriptive, well-thought-out, organized way we can look at: where have folks moved, where are Albertans living, and how do we properly set it up so that everyone has effective representation? That happens every eight to 10 years because, like I said, Alberta is growing because we have a wonderful province inside a wonderful country, and we want folks to come here and feel welcome. We want folks to plant their roots here and share their talents and allow their children and their next generations to thrive here. That’s what we want, but that’s not what we’re getting from this UCP and from this bill.

Now, I’ll remind you that the boundaries commission: they met. There was a round 1. We had input from thousands of Albertans across the province who shared their personal thoughts on how the map should be adjusted to reflect what their values were, what their priorities were. Thousands upon thousands of Albertans. That was round 1. The commission then presented a draft map. That map then underwent more public consultation, more Albertans taking time out of their very busy lives to step forward to put their words forward, their concerns, their values forward so that the next electoral provincial map for Alberta was actually effective representation.

Then we were presented the majority map, the decision from the independent public commission. We were presented this map. Part of the presentation of the map had this kind of – well, I shouldn’t say kind of – unprecedented piece where there was kind of this amendment, this little extra piece put at the back. There’s been a lot of discussion around what was said about it and what wasn’t, and I just want to reinforce comments that members of the commission had shared about that particular map and it kind of coming out of nowhere. What they shared is that there was an about-face that therefore gave the public no notice and that that minority’s reasonings are substantially unreasonable.

These are unprecedented times because this UCP government is going against what prior governments inside Alberta have done, well, for all of history. The system is set up to provide Albertans a fair, transparent, and respectful map so that Albertans receive effective representation. What the UCP government is doing is deciding that they don’t care about that. They don’t care that Albertans have spent their hard-pressed time, their energies, their concerns. They have exercised their democracy, and the UCP has decided they don’t care, and they’re going against their own commission’s advice and deciding that they’re just going to skirt the rules once again because they’re losing, because Albertans know what they’re doing.

**9:00**

Now, in no other time in Alberta’s history has a government skewed democracy to benefit themselves so much. We’ve talked

inside this Chamber about prior Premiers who were found to misuse public funds and that Albertans were not okay with that. Well, Albertans are not okay with this either, Madam Chair. Bill 32 simply enables the UCP government to create a map that reflects their needs and their wants and not effective representation for Albertans. And Albertans should be mad.

Even if we ignore the effective representation piece and we just took a snapshot of what these actions of the UCP are costing Alberta, the cost of the commission itself, well spent had this government accepted the majority report, well spent because it connected Albertans towards a shared goal of wanting the best thing for our province. And the best thing for our province is having Albertans' voices raised effectively inside this House. It would have been effectively used. It would have been a smart investment, but instead of accepting it, they've rejected it. So now taxpayer money continues to fund whatever rabbit hole it is that this government feels they need to go down in order to secure their jobs in the next election.

I always question whether this is it. Is this the line? Will members of the other side finally give their heads a shake and understand that what they're putting forward is contrary to everything that we are supposed to be doing in this House? I think it's important every time a government brings forward a bill to reflect on who does it benefit. I've already mentioned the waste.

So we move forward with this UCP-stacked committee with zero further public consultation, and Albertans are supposed to – what? Somehow trust that this government is, yeah, okay, stacking the deck in their favour, but that's completely for your benefit? Albertans know it's not. It is so obvious that the insecurity of this government is driving their decisions. When someone finds themselves in a precarious situation or potentially backed into a corner, they make bad decisions.

I understand that that might be a little hard to decipher from all the other bad decisions this government has made; however, Bill 32 dismantles our very democracy. It undoes lessons that we all understand about democracy, that our voices matter. In the 2023 election I was the successful candidate by 22 votes. Now, what is really cool about that is that I still, to this day, and I hope every day forever, honestly, Madam Chair, meet my constituents who were one of the 22, who know that because they went to cast their vote that day, I am their representative. They know that they matter.

By pushing through Bill 32 and by manipulating Albertans' voices – this is catastrophic. I know Albertans are paying attention. I'm asking them to be louder. I'm asking them to e-mail every single member, well, actually, inside this Chamber. Let us know how you feel. What do you think about this government deciding that they're going to mess with the map so that they can basically ensure themselves to be government for the next two terms, eight years? Is that what you want? Where's your vote?

Now, I know there are lots of folks on this side of the House who would like their opportunity to share, so I will close by asking that the folks on the other side consider the ramifications of this bill, that they consider whether they're onside with a government that needs to change the rules in order to win. Cheating is cheating. I hope that everyone in this Chamber votes against Bill 32.

**The Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

**Ms Wright:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm rising today to speak to Bill 32, which is a bill that is remarkably brief. But even through its briefness it carries with it an awful lot of profound consequences for our democracy and for the trust that all Albertans place in our electoral system, the trust to make sure that everything is run with integrity. Bill 32 consists of one amendment, and that amendment

is that it strikes out the word "89" and substitutes "91" proposed electoral divisions. Despite its small size, as I alluded to, it packs quite the punch. It is one of those bills that all Albertans should be paying attention to because of the risk of harm. It's not just harm for the next election. It's consequential because this is the next couple of elections. And, more than that, it's harm because of what Albertans expect their democracy to look like, the trust that's embedded, that is being risked in this.

To understand why it matters, I think it's probably good if we take a wee bit of a walk through time to the process that brought us to this House today debating Bill 32 and perhaps to allow for a few solutions. Alberta has got a well-established, lawful, and well-understood process for setting electoral boundaries. It is certainly not new. It's not experimental. In fact, it might even be called boring. I myself called it boring about a week ago when I was speaking to a group of workers. But in even that group of workers, there were probably – I don't know – 60, 70, 80 people there, they all knew about this. That in some ways, Madam Chair, was actually quite frightening to me. It should be boring. It should be something that just simply happens. It shouldn't be anything that makes news. It should be something that we can trust and just sort of – you know, the machine that kind of runs in the background of our democratic foundations. But right now it's not running in the background, and it's not running in the background because of the choices that the UCP has vested upon us.

We know that it's a process that's been followed repeatedly over decades. As I alluded to, every 10 years or so those electoral boundaries, the ridings, the constituencies that we all come from are reviewed to reflect things like population growth, shifting demographics, and changing realities of communities across the province. You know, I've got this map of Alberta in my head, that I used to put on my classroom wall, you know, that growth from, like, 83 to 87 ridings. We talked about it, my grade 6 class and I, the reason why it had to grow, why it was important, why it reflected growth, and why it reflected as well differences in population in terms of where people decided to live.

The process, that is hard, is about fairness, but it's more than just fairness. It's also about equity because it attempts to balance the needs of not just rural and urban but also – and we know this because we've also talked about it in the House, the fact that there should be and are in fact some ridings that might have less population, but the geography expanse is just so huge that they need to have a few less people. That's all built in and baked into that process that has worked now for decades.

#### 9:10

Professor Fluker, who's out of the University of Calgary law school, talks about this. He talks about the fact that the path – and this is in his, I think, series called ABLawg. He calls this The Minority Report on Electoral Districts: Will the Law Protect Alberta from UCP Gerrymandering? One of the things that he says here is that

the path to setting electoral districts in Alberta begins with a . . . commission appointed . . . [they] review existing electoral districts and propose changes . . . The function and purpose . . . is to ensure that the electoral districts constitute "effective representation," taking into account prescribed considerations set out in section 14 of the Act. These . . . include population numbers, community interests, culture, [multiple] municipal borders, geography, and the need for clarity, consistency, and coherence.

He notes that population changes are the most significant consideration – quite frankly, totally logical – and he says that "the intention of this rule" – and this is the rule where "the population of a proposed electoral district must not be more than 25% above nor

more than 25% below the average population of all the proposed electoral districts.” He says here in his blog that “the intention of this rule is to ensure relative (but not exact) voting parity across electoral districts, as people move to and from and within Alberta over the years.” In other words, Madam Chair, and with those exceptions aside, what this is really doing is making sure that, as much as possible, each vote, no matter where it is you happen to live in Alberta, matters as much as the person who lives 500 kilometres away from you. That is effective representation.

In terms of the commission itself, it was a fascinating process. In 2016 – I think that was when the last commission was struck – I sat in front of the commission – I will admit I was a little bit frightened – and talked about my home constituency. The judge who was in charge of it all asked me some really, really tough questions that really gave me an awful lot of pause, but it did indeed, in those moments that I was there in front of that particular group of commission members, really serve to underscore the seriousness of their job. They had to ask these really tough questions because they had a really important job to do: where to place all the different boundaries in the province. It’s not a job for the fainthearted, but it’s also not a job where things should be taken to chance and where there should even be a hint of political partisanship, Madam Chair.

Certainly, in our version, between the fall and January, February, we know that our commission did similar work. It was difficult work. They travelled all throughout the province. Albertans showed up in record numbers, and they did so through in-person interviews and presentations, whether they made an online presentation or through e-mail. Thousands; more than in any other electoral commission out there. They spoke about their towns and neighbourhoods, often with a great deal of passion. Actually, that was, I think, one of the best things about participating this time around, having the chance to hear so many people from so many different places talk with a great deal of passion about their community and about what their suggestion was for the next iteration. It was absolutely fascinating.

As I say here in my notes, this was not at all perfunctory. It was a deeply engaged democratic exercise, and it was important because the commission, in doing so, followed all of those required steps, all of the steps that all those previous electoral boundary commission folks had followed. They gave us an interim report that was unanimous, they proposed the 89 seats that previous legislation had granted them, then came that second round of hearings. A few more Albertans got a chance to participate. They completed their report. The report was submitted here.

All of that, Madam Chair, was what was supposed to happen, with, of course, one exception, the exception being that minority report. Under the legislation there’s no ambiguity about what constitutes the outcome of the work of a commission. The decision of the commission is a unanimous report if there is one, a majority report when there’s not. In this case, contrary to what a few other folks have said, the majority report was absolutely crystal clear. That set of maps that they gave us – it was very clear. These are their maps that they were recommending that this Legislature vote on. The addenda, the minority reports, and all those individual comments are not supposed to override that majority report. They weren’t supposed to replace it.

The majority report in this case closely resembled the unanimous interim report. There were of course some changes, and there were changes, Madam Chair, because they listened to the people who presented in front of them in that second round of hearings. The biggest thing I think that that all demonstrates is that the commission, in fact, remained faithful not only to what Albertans were consulted on and all those things that Albertans have said, but

they remained faithful to the legislation itself and the importance of their work.

Now, of course, we all know that within that majority report the commissioners raised concerns about the minority approach. They talked about the fact that it violated principles of procedural fairness, values underlying section 3 of the Charter and the right to vote.

I’m going to say here that Professor Fluker actually adds some interesting things here, too. He says: “My focus here is on the assertion made by the majority of Commission members that the minority report is unlawful.” He calls that assertion “truly astounding,” Madam Chair, for it speaks volumes in terms of the situation that those members of that commission found themselves. He goes on to say that

The Report observes the minority report makes radical changes to many electoral districts that have no basis in any submissions received by the Commission and [in fact] accuses the minority report of employing hybrid districts to add rural representation at the expense of urban voters.

He talks about Calgary in particular, noting that in many places it “departs from using population numbers as justification.” His conclusion, Madam Chair, much like the conclusion of many Albertans at the moment, is that that has indeed set the stage for UCP gerrymandering. The commission members in the strongest words available – I’m quoting from Professor Fluker again – “have advised the Legislature to prevent this from happening by disregarding the minority report.” That’s what should have happened. They should simply have gone with the majority report. That’s what we should have been talking about in this House, but instead we are here with Bill 32.

One of the problems with this is that, of course, having to go back in time and take those 89 seats and magically make them 91 seats and then to establish a Select Special Committee on Electoral Boundaries that is composed of members from the government, from the Official Opposition, that’s chaired by a government MLA, one that’s empowered to engage an advisory panel, but that panel simply reports to that legislative committee, which of course has the majority of UCP members. How it departs from the proceedings of the boundary commission itself is that there’s no requirement to hold public hearings. There’s no requirement to even consider or respect the submissions that were already made. This is a problem. It’s not independent, it’s not transparent, it’s not fair, and it certainly, Madam Chair, is not what Albertans want.

With that, I will finish my presentation tonight just by saying that because it isn’t transparent, it isn’t fair, and we know that it isn’t what Albertans want, that is what this government should be looking for. I urge everyone in this House to vote against Bill 32.

**The Chair:** Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

**Ms Al-Guneid:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak on Bill 32, a bill that paves the way to redrawing the electoral maps in Alberta. I grew up in a country where before the ballots were counted, a dictator had won with 99 per cent of the vote. Sometimes a dictator would win at 87 per cent so it was more believable. It is a mockery of the process and institutions. Your vote truly didn’t matter.

Despite this dictatorship, election after election my parents still showed up at the polls and voted because the process mattered to them, Madam Chair. While they knew deep inside that their vote didn’t matter and wouldn’t change the final outcome, they believed they had a responsibility to vote and hoped that one day their

children, including me, would see a world where our vote mattered. And here we are debating Bill 32.

**9:20**

I never thought I would be worried whether my vote would matter or not, Madam Chair. I never thought I'd be worried about the fairness or credibility of our democratic process. We're privileged to live in a democracy that safeguards our freedoms. Democracy is fragile. As an elected official I strongly feel the responsibility of this institution and the privileges and responsibilities that come with it. We must never put politics over our democratic institutions, and we must be vigilant of external influences and extreme groups in Alberta that could impact our democracy rights and privileges, but here we are debating Bill 32.

Gerrymandering, Madam Chair, as my colleague the member from Mountain View says, is a special word for cheating, and it's a specific type of cheating where elected officials draw electoral boundaries so that some people, people who elected officials like, get more of a say than others. That doesn't sound right or fair, does it?

Normally the redrawing of the electoral divisions in Alberta is a pretty boring process. Lisa Young, a political science professor from the University of Calgary shares her experience, and I quote her here.

Years ago, I was at the political science conference where the after-dinner speaker gave a history of electoral boundary processes in Canada. It was boring. It was so boring that I remember it twenty years later. It was so boring, it was an out-of-body experience.

This is a good thing! You know a democracy is stable when the rules governing electoral competition are well-intentioned, non-partisan, and so widely accepted that no one feels the need to pay close attention.

Boring is good, Madam Chair, when it comes to electoral boundaries, and it's usually a pretty straightforward process. The commission is established. The commission spends almost a year consulting with Albertans. We get a report. The report goes into the House. There's a motion to concur. It gets drawn into an act, and done, a new set of boundaries by Albertans for Albertans. Boring. But not this time. This time the UCP decided the commission got a little too independent, too ethical, and too nonpartisan, so now they want MLAs on a UCP-dominated committee to redraw boundaries with no input from Albertans.

Madam Chair, Bill 32 does one thing and only one thing, one single amendment to the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. It proposes that the divisions be increased from 89 to 91 seats. It sounds benign, but there's an important background here. The UCP government already raised the number of seats from 87 to 89 in fall 2024, and that's through Bill 31. That's for starters.

We also had an independent process that delivered new maps. We had the nonpartisan Electoral Boundaries Commission. To be clear to those who may be following this debate and this process, the UCP struck the Electoral Boundaries Commission in spring 2025 with Justice Miller appointed by cabinet as the chair. The commission released an interim report on October 23, 2025. The interim report was agreed to by all five members of the commission. None dissented. None objected. Full agreement.

The commission published a final report on March 23, 2026. Madam Chair, the majority report was overall balanced and clearly built off the existing map, the interim report, and the feedback received through two rounds of public consultations for almost a year. The two UCP-appointed members wrote a minority report and included detailed gerrymandered maps. The minority report deviated drastically from the interim report, which is odd since both

these members were still with the majority when that was released only five months earlier.

So what happened, Madam Chair? Instead of passing the commission's majority report, the UCP has created and pursued an alternative and illegitimate process. This is the most antidemocratic action ever taken by an Alberta government. My office has received many e-mails from folks who actually showed up to the public consultations with the commission.

Terry, from Oakridge in my riding of Calgary-Glenmore, shared with us his letter to the Premier.

Madam Premier. As a voter who made a submission to the Boundary Commission, I am angry and disappointed that UCP appointees presumed to write what amounts to a minority report contrary to the Commission's final report, which demonstrates your party's indifference to voter submissions, and its willingness to undermine the commission's democratically informed effort over months. As disappointed as your party may be with the report, it should be ratified as is, barring some form of misconduct that has not been alleged to date – any other outcome would be hypocritically undemocratic. You have declared that you are the most democratic premier in Canada, a boast contrary to your actions in office to date. But will you this time accept the commission's process-based judgment? Or the UCP-friendly minority report? I truly despise having to ask the question but in your case, sadly, I must.

Thanks for writing to my office, Terry.

Madam Chair, not only did the UCP government toss away the independent majority report, the report that was created through a legitimate process, but the UCP are now clutching to recommendation 5 in the addendum by the chair, Justice Miller, and, to be clear, the chair, Justice Miller, signed on by only himself as a guardrail against the shocking gerrymandered minority reports. The chair wrote in his own recommendation 5, "for the express purpose of dissuading the Legislature from accepting the minority report." He literally told us in the report. We expect better from the government.

At the end of the addendum the chair made the following statement, clarifying that the addendum was not part of the majority report. He says, "Lest there be any confusion about this issue, my writing this Addendum in no way detracts from the majority report representing the views of a majority of the Commission." Why is the UCP ignoring this crystal clear statement from Justice Miller? The UCP government introduced an illegitimate process through Government Motion 37. This motion was framed as responding to the Electoral Boundaries Commission's final report but replaced the completed Electoral Boundaries Commission process with a new UCP-led process in a UCP-majority committee.

Madam Chair, this approach is clearly different and contradicting to the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. The act has the Legislature either adopting or rejecting the commission's recommendations but does not re-engineer the process. Now we have the UCP striking a special committee on electoral boundaries, and we believe this process is illegitimate. The reason we have colleagues from our caucus participating in it is because we have a duty to protect the rights of Albertans, defend democracy, and try to prevent this committee from chipping away at our most fundamental rights. Albertans need to know that this process is illegitimate, and Albertans should be concerned on how this impacts the trust and credibility of these maps.

We haven't even talked about the waste of taxpayer money on redoing this process, Madam Chair. The cost of the Electoral Boundaries Commission, that just wrapped up this spring, was nearly \$1 million. All that work is gone to waste. A very significant amount of time was invested in the Electoral Boundaries

Commission by the commission and the public who submitted feedback and attended hearings as well.

**9:30**

In conclusion, Madam Chair, this UCP government insists on secrecy and partisan interference because they know that a transparent and independent process would expose this cheating. By voting for backroom decision-making and rejecting public oversight, the UCP has made their position clear. They have no interest in free and fair elections, only in rigging the rules of democracy for their own personal gain.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** The hon. Member for Calgary-North East.

**Member Gurinder Brar:** Thank you, Madam Chair. In ancient Athens democracy happened in the dust, in the open air, in the noise of a restless crowd. Citizens would gather, and instead of paper ballots they used broken pieces of pottery, small rough fragments called ostraca. Each person would scratch a name onto the clay, and the name written most often would belong to the person sent away from the city for 10 years. It was not a perfect system. It was not always fair. But it carried one warning, that no one should become so powerful that democracy has to fear that person.

In that city lived a man named Aristides. People called him Aristides the Just. Not Aristides the Rich, not Aristides the Loud, not Aristides the Powerful; Aristides the Just. One day as people were voting, an ordinary man came up to Aristides. The man did not know he was standing in front of Aristides himself. He held out a broken piece of pottery and said, "Can you write a name for me?" Aristides asked, "What name?" The man said, "Aristides."

Imagine that moment, Madam Chair: the noise of the crowd around him, the clay in his hand, his own name on the lips of a stranger. Aristides looked at the man and asked, "Has Aristides ever harmed you?" The man said: "No. I don't even know him. I'm just tired of hearing everyone call him 'the Just.'" Now, Aristides could have argued. He could have exposed the man's ignorance. He could have said: do you know who I am? But he did not. He took the pottery, he scratched his own name onto it, and quietly handed it back.

That is a powerful thing, Madam Chair. A man was asked to participate in a process that could punish him personally, and still he respected that process. He understood something that every government must remember, that democracy is bigger than ego. Democracy is bigger than convenience. Democracy is bigger than the comfort of those in power because democracy does not die. Only when armies march through the streets, it dies more quietly. When debate is cut short, when questions are treated like obstacles, when scrutiny is treated like delay: that's when democracy dies. That's how democracy dies.

Democracy was never meant to be convenient, Madam Chair. It was meant to be heard. It was meant to be tested. It was meant to breathe. And if we want democracy to protect us, then we must have the courage, the restraint, and the humility to protect democracy.

This bill is not about democracy. It is not about protecting democracy. It is about convenience: convenience of this UCP government, convenience of this Premier, convenience of the ego of Conservative entitlement. From everyday Albertans to the media to experts, everyone has raised red flags against the UCP's plans to mess with maps. They call it gerrymandering.

Madam Chair, in 1812 a Massachusetts governor, Elbridge Gerry, signed a redistricting bill that twisted electoral boundaries to favour his own party. One of the districts was so strangely shaped that critics said it looked like a salamander, and from Gerry plus

salamander came the word "gerrymander." This is how a political monster was born in 1812, not from the people, not from fairness, not from democracy but from the ego of politicians who looked at the map and asked: how do we keep power? They did not ask: how do we represent people fairly? They asked: how do we draw the people in a way that protects our own power?

That is the exact danger we are facing today in Alberta. That ego hasn't gone away. That hunger for power hasn't gone away. That desire to make democracy serve the government instead of making government serve democracy has not gone away. In a democracy people are supposed to choose their government, but in a gerrymander the government tries to choose its people, and that's exactly what this UCP government is trying to do. That is not confidence; that is fear. That is not representation; that is manipulation. That is not democracy drawing a map; that is power drawing a cage.

Madam Chair, we have a process in Alberta that exists to protect effective representation, make voices heard, and strengthen our democracy. All it needs is honesty. All it needs is somebody who values fairness. All it needs is respect for democracy.

It would not be fair to move forward without mentioning former Premier Rachel Notley. The same process of drawing electoral boundaries happened under Premier Rachel Notley. The process was followed, submissions were accepted, maps were drawn. The maps were not favourable to many cabinet ministers, including the minister of energy, Minister of Justice, Minister of Finance, and many others, but did she interfere in the process? No, Madam Chair. Did she complain about the maps? No, she didn't. And did she think of changing the maps to her favour? Not for a single second. That is leadership that values fairness, that is leadership that values honesty, that is leadership that values democratic process, and that is the standard this government should be trying to meet.

Instead, what do we see? We see a government that looks at an independent process and asks: how can we bend this process in our favour? We see a government that looks at the democratic rules and asks: how can we use them to our own favour? We see a government that looks at the people of Alberta and asks: how can we divide them in a way that protects the Conservative entitlement? That is not how democracy should work.

**9:40**

Electoral boundaries are not just lines on the map. They are communities. They are neighbourhoods. They are the voices that must matter in a democratic society. When you move those lines, you're not just moving the ink on the paper; you're changing who speaks for those communities, how those communities are represented, and whether their communities remain whole or get divided for political convenience.

Madam Chair, politicians should never be allowed to even hold the pen that draws these lines. Politicians should never be allowed to look at voters as pages that they can tear, trash, and throw. Politicians should never be allowed to treat democracy as a playbook that it can play with. Democracy does not belong to the Premier. Democracy does not belong to this UCP cabinet. Democracy does not belong to this UCP government.

This bill sends a wrong message, Madam Chair. It tells Albertans that when government does not like the process, it will change the process; when the government does not like the rules, it will rewrite the rules; and when the government fears losing power, it will try to redraw the path to power. That is dangerous because once a government starts treating democracy as an inconvenience, where does it stop? In October it was the notwithstanding clause. Yesterday it was limiting debate. Today it is boundaries. Where does the buck stop? It stops with the Premier. That's where it stops.

Madam Chair, we are not here simply to debate a technical bill. We are here to defend the idea of democratic principle. We are here to defend the idea that elections must be fair, that communities must be respected. We are here to defend the idea that governments must never be allowed to choose their voters.

Madam Chair, Albertans are watching. They're watching a government that cuts debate when it does not want to answer questions. They are watching a government that dismisses experts when it does not like their warnings. They're watching a government that wants to mess with the maps, but Albertans are smarter than this government thinks. They know when power is being protected instead of people, they know when fairness is being replaced by arrogance, they know when a government has stopped listening, and I know Albertans will remember. They will remember who respected democracy when it was easy and who respected democracy when it was hard.

Democracy is not only tested when we win. Democracy is tested when the rules do not favour us, and former Premier Rachel Notley passed that test. This government is failing it, but, Madam Chair, I do not want to end only with what is wrong. I want to end with what is possible because better days are on the horizon. There is a better way to govern, a way where government does not fear debate because it respects the people, a way where government does not manipulate maps because they trust voters, a way where government does not silence voices because it understands that democracy becomes stronger when more people are heard. That is the kind of government Albertans deserve, and I believe Albertans are ready for change.

Albertans want a government that listens. They want a government that respects rural Alberta, urban Alberta, northern Alberta, new Canadians, workers, families, seniors, students, and every person who calls this province home. They want a government that understands that democracy is not something to be managed from the top down. It is something to be protected from the ground up.

That is what an Alberta NDP government will do. We will restore fairness. We will restore honesty. We will restore respect for democracy. The future of Alberta does not belong to those who clench to power. It belongs to the people.

With that, Madam Chair, I will pass it on to my other colleagues to share their remarks. I ask everyone in this House to oppose this bill.

**The Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

**Mr. Deol:** Thank you, Madam Chair. May I ask, like: how much time do I have?

**The Chair:** You have under nine minutes.

**Mr. Deol:** Nine minutes. Thank you very much.

Madam Chair, it's my privilege. I'll be quick. My colleagues actually spoke to this bill very eloquently. It was amazing to hear the colleagues speaking and bringing so many different perspectives in speaking to this bill. I wanted to say that I have been in this Assembly for the past seven years. When we look at the characteristics of this UCP government, it is something very different. It's not normal. It's not a normal government. It's not normal politics. It is something we really need to be worried about. It's something we really need to understand, where we are today and which direction we are heading under this new UCP government. It's not simply a different political platform, party A, party B, a traditional PC, Liberal, or NDP debate. It is something that has completely changed, something that Albertans have not experienced in the history of this province.

This UCP government does not believe in democracy, does not believe in the democratic process, and does not respect public voices. I have seen that Albertans spoke out. They spoke against government policy on coal. Government got a push-back, but did government stop? No, they did not stop. Albertans spoke against the UCP plan to create an APP, and Albertans spoke against their policy collectively, in a bigger majority. Did this UCP government stop? No, they did not stop. Albertans spoke against creating a provincial police force. I just wanted to say for the record that it was not only, like, the people from the larger cities. The majority of those people who spoke against a provincial police, those policies: those people were from rural municipalities, rural communities. Did this government care? No. They find loopholes, back doors to force their hidden agenda.

More than that, we say in the public domain, very common: if you have anything in your mind about the people you represent, the health care issue – I never expected in my life that I will see a person dying waiting in an emergency room, waiting for treatment. One death is, like, too many. Did this government show their heart? Did the government change anything for them? They're back to the same track. They're rushing even faster than that to dismantle public health care. They are creating more hurdles to public services.

9:50

More than that, the government is a big fan of referendums. Under this UCP government the referendum was actually conducted on standardizing the time in the province. Albertans spoke out on that, what they wanted. But did that matter to this UCP government? No, it did not. They got push-back. They used this time to cool it down. Then they're back to their agenda again.

Bill 32, Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2026. What this government is doing under this bill is that, you know, they appointed their own members, created the independent commission, gave them a task to do. They spent months and months of time to speak with Albertans when they conducted the report and tabled the report in this House. And that's not something the UCP liked. Even their own hand-picked people they didn't like because that does not serve their purpose, because that does not serve their agenda.

Now the government wants to restart that whole process again because the government wants to pick who can vote so they can remain in power, not the idea the constituents vote for their representatives to represent them in the House to serve the province. It doesn't seem fair to them because they might lose the election, but they have been doing this for the past seven years. Now they want to go back. They want their MLAs to draw the lines so they can see who can vote and how they can remain in power because they're very certain that Albertans are not going to support them.

The UCP rejects expert feedback. They dismiss public participation. When it conflicts with their agenda, they don't like it. They undermine democratic norms. The weakening of trust in institutions we have seen in many ways. I don't have a lot of time to expand on it. They don't like courts. They don't like public services. Finally, they don't like the electoral system because they know their record will not support them going back to the public to secure power.

Bill 32 is not only antidemocratic; it's crossing the limit.

**The Chair:** Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but one hour of debate has now been concluded on Bill 32, and I must now put the question. The question is on Bill 32, the Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2026.

[The voice vote indicated that the clauses of Bill 32 were agreed to]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:54 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	Lunty	Stephan
Dreeshen	McDougall	Turton
Dyck	Nally	van Dijken
Ellis	Neudorf	Wiebe
Fir	Nicolaides	Williams
Getson	Nixon	Wilson
Glubish	Petrovic	Wright, J.
Horner	Rowswell	Yao
Hunter	Sawhney	Yaseen
Jean	Sawyer	

**10:00**

Against:

Al-Guneid	Chapman	Ganley
Arcand-Paul	Deol	Ip
Batten	Eggen	Metz
Brar, Gurinder	Ellingson	Wright, P.
Brar, Gurtej	Elmeligi	
Totals:	For – 44	Against – 14

[The clauses of Bill 32 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Any opposed? That is carried.  
The Minister of Justice.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report bills 25, 28, 29, and 32.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

**Mr. van Dijken:** Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 25, Bill 29, Bill 28, Bill 32.

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

**Hon. Members:** Aye.

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

## Government Bills and Orders

### Third Reading

#### Bill 25

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

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education and Childcare.

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to move third reading of Bill 25, An Act to Remove Politics and Ideology from Classrooms and Amend the Education Act, 2026.

Madam Speaker, since I introduced Bill 25 I've heard some interesting criticism that oftentimes bears little resemblance to the legislation that is actually before the Assembly. The opposition has been loud, co-ordinated, and at times deliberately misleading. I believe Albertans deserve better, so let me set the record straight this evening.

One of the most common falsehoods that I've heard repeated, including in this very Chamber, is that the bill bans teachers from teaching controversial topics. Madam Speaker, this is categorically false. Nothing in Bill 25 prevents a teacher from discussing things like residential schools, climate change, the Holocaust, or any other difficult subject. In fact, these topics are part of the government-mandated curriculum and thus must be taught in our schools. What the legislation does, though, is direct school boards to ensure that conversations and debates unrelated to the curriculum ensure students hear a range of perspectives rather than being steered towards a particular conclusion.

I want to be very clear. I believe the vast majority of Alberta's teachers already do exactly that. They are dedicated professionals who take their responsibilities seriously. This legislation doesn't target them. It sets a clear and consistent standard for the entire province so that every parent can trust that the publicly funded classroom is a place of open inquiry and not advocacy.

I have also heard concerns that the bill's provisions regarding flags will destroy diversity. Madam Speaker, every child in Alberta is welcome in our schools, and that will not change. What Bill 25 does is establish that public schools, institutions funded by taxpayers, should display the flags of Canada and Alberta. These are important symbols because they are shared symbols that belong to every one of us regardless of our religion, race, ethnic background, or gender. The legislation includes a deliberate exemption framework through regulation to allow schools to display flags tied to heritage, history, school culture, or other temporary events as necessary. What I am asking in this bill is to ensure that the walls of publicly funded classrooms are not permanent billboards for political or social movements on any side of the spectrum. This is institutional neutrality, not hostility to any group.

Madam Speaker, some current and former trustees have suggested that this bill renders school boards irrelevant. That is an overstatement that does not serve the public debate well. School boards remain elected bodies with significant authority over their communities and nothing in Bill 25 changes that fundamental relationship. What the legislation does is add provincial oversight in very specific and targeted areas, including superintendent contracts, naming of public school buildings, and the setting of provincial strategic priorities. These are important guardrails to ensure ultimate accountability. Albertans fund this system. I am accountable to them, and I take that accountability seriously.

The Alberta Teachers' Association has provided criticism and has called the bill "a solution in search of a problem." With respect, I must disagree. In June 2023 a Muslim girl was told that she didn't belong in Canada by her teacher because this young student believed that attending pride activities at school was inconsistent with her faith. This is one example, but my office has heard from parents across the province who feel that classrooms have at times become spaces where one set of values is advanced over another. I'm not suggesting this reflects the profession as a whole. It does not, but the absence of a universal problem does not mean that there is no problem at all. Bill 25 establishes clear expectations precisely so that professional standards are not left to individual interpretation. Clarity is not an attack on teachers. It is a service to them.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Canadian Civil Liberties Association has claimed this bill entrenches censorship by giving the government the power to define political or ideological content. Mr. Speaker, this misreads the legislation entirely. Bill 25 does not create a government body to review lesson plans or approve classroom discussions. The requirement is that teachers approach contested subjects with objectivity and present a range of perspectives, a professional obligation that perfects students' ability to think for themselves. The Canadian Civil Liberties Association has also raised concerns about removing reference to diversity from the Education Act. Now, the word has been removed from a specific section, but the commitment to inclusive, safe schools for every child has not changed and is reinforced elsewhere in the legislation. Removing a single word from a statute does not mean that value is erased.

Earlier today, however, Mr. Speaker, I was made aware of the Alberta Teachers' Association's guidance to teachers, which I must bring to the Assembly's attention. The association published an editorial advising teachers not to proactively adjust their practice, describing Bill 25 as "a grab-bag of incoherent provisions," openly encouraging them to "rise above" its provisions and went so far as to speak openly about creative noncompliance. Let me be clear. What the Alberta Teachers' Association actually did here – a professional organization asked, essentially, its members to treat duly enacted provincial legislation as something to be ignored or outweighed. This is not professional guidance. This is institutional defiance dressed up as advice.

The ATA justified this posture by noting that regulations have not yet been finalized and that teachers should wait for more direction from their boards before making changes. On this narrow procedural point they are correct. Regulations are being developed, but the editorial went further than that, calling the bill's provisions incoherent, labelling the title disingenuous, and characterizing the premise as fundamentally misguided. It is a coordinated campaign to delegitimize the bill before it has even come into force.

Now, the Alberta Teachers' Association is right that teachers are professionals, and we agree, but being a professional includes operating within the legislative framework that governs public education in this province. The ATA has every right to advocate for changes through proper channels. Encouraging members to treat the law as something to rise above is a different matter entirely, and Albertans should be concerned with what they are seeing. Furthermore, if the ATA's position is that the bill's requirements are so vague they cannot be followed, that argument undermines itself. Regulations will provide specificity. The association has been invited to participate in that process. Prejudging the outcome while discouraging compliance is not a principled position. It is an

attempt to win politically what could not be won legislatively. That will not succeed.

Now, since Bill 25 was introduced, members of the NDP opposition have also raised some concerns and raised those claims on the floor of the Assembly. Those claims are now part of the public record, so I'm pleased to provide some more detailed response.

**10:10**

On April 1 the Leader of the Opposition stated that Bill 25 focuses on symbolic and ideological issues instead of real problems in schools. This framing, unfortunately, is both inaccurate and telling, inaccurate because the bill's substantive provisions on literacy and numeracy intervention, school violence, and educator professional standards are anything but symbolic. They are legal obligations with real consequences for students.

The argument that school naming in the bill is the bill's defining feature is only possible if you choose to ignore the majority of the content. The comments are telling because the NDP's preferred framing conveniently excludes the issues that parents have been raising with my office for years: classrooms being used as platforms for political advocacy in a system that has too often prioritized ideological comfort over student academic outcomes. Those problems are real, and Bill 25 takes them seriously.

On the same day in this Assembly the Leader of the Opposition also went further to say that Bill 25 strips inclusive language from the Education Act and makes schools "less welcoming." In the Legislature the leader argued that the removal of the words "welcoming" and "diversity" from the Education Act signals that the government wants schools to be less welcoming to certain students. While indeed some words are being changed, the new language uses the word "caring" to ensure students are supported and the amendments further add the words "respectful and responsible behaviours" because teachers and parents have asked for safer classrooms free from violence and aggression. Every child in Alberta's publicly funded school system will always be welcome and nothing in Bill 25 alters that, despite fear and misinformation.

Now, furthermore, on April 2 the Leader of the Opposition accused the government of using Bill 25 to censor classrooms and make it harder for teachers to address historically clear issues such as genocide, slavery, residential schools and stated that Bill 25 makes it impossible to teach genocide, residential schools, or historical atrocities.

As I've already noted, nothing in Bill 25 prevents a teacher from discussing residential schools, climate change, the Holocaust, or any other difficult subject, and as I've already noted, these topics are part of a government-mandated curriculum and therefore must be taught.

Unfortunately, given these comments, it would appear that the NDP has either not read the bill or does not understand it at all. What the legislation does is direct school boards to ensure that conversations and debates unrelated to the curriculum ensure that students hear a range of perspectives rather than being steered towards a single conclusion. I want to be very clear again. I do believe that the vast majority of teachers do exactly that. They are professionals who take their responsibilities seriously.

Now, lost in some of the noise is a provision that I'm extremely proud of in Bill 25. Bill 25 requires every school authority in Alberta to include a clear and explicit statement in their student codes of conduct prohibiting violence of any kind. It also reinforces the role that students themselves play in preventing violence in their communities. This is not a minor housekeeping amendment. School violence is real and a growing challenge across the province. Bill 25 updates the language in the Education Act to strengthen the

focus on safe, caring environments built on respectful and responsible behaviour.

Early literacy and numeracy screening tests also show across the province that approximately 1 in 4 Alberta students today need intervention support in reading, writing, and math, 1 in 4. Mr. Speaker, that is unacceptable and I will not pretend otherwise. Bill 25 requires school authorities and early childhood service operators to provide mandatory intervention supports for any child identified with a learning gap. In Budget '26 the literacy and numeracy support grant, which has increased by 60 per cent, makes \$20 million available to school boards this school year alone to support screening and intervention work.

The debate over Bill 25 does not exist in a vacuum. It is the latest chapter in a long-running contest over who controls Alberta's classrooms and what values are instilled in Alberta's children. Albertans deserve to understand that contest clearly. When the NDP held government, they set out a vision for our education system and social studies curriculum with an explicit and stated goal to turn Alberta students into what their own curriculum called, quote, effective agents of change, end quote.

That phrase was not buried in technical language. It was the animating concept of their proposed curriculum, a document so ideologically loaded that it provoked immediate and sustained opposition from parents, educators, and Albertans across the province. The NDP curriculum was built around the idea that the classroom is not a place for learning foundational knowledge and developing independent thinking; it is a launching pad for social activism.

Students were not to be taught history under the NDP curriculum and then trusted to form their own conclusions. Rather, they were being guided through the curriculum itself toward, quote: taking action on current topics and issues. From the earliest grades children were to be oriented towards social advocacy. That was their clear objective. The curriculum framed active citizenship not as informed civic participation but as organized pressure for political change. That was not a theoretical concern. The framework was explicit, and the NDP government did not dispute it because the language was their own.

Their intentions were clear. Parents across Alberta understood immediately what it meant. It meant using the public school system to produce a generation of citizens preoriented towards the political left's priorities. It meant the curriculum was not designed to educate children; it was designed to mobilize them. That agenda was rejected, and it is rejected again.

We will never allow the NDP or any government to weaponize Alberta's curriculum against Alberta's own children. We will never allow the NDP to turn our classrooms into organizing grounds for political causes. Bill 25 is where it stops for good, and this is exactly why the NDP is so mad. This bill will close the door forever on their plans to use the education system to advance their ideology.

The NDP in the Legislature and in public has portrayed Bill 25 as an attack on education. They have it precisely backwards. Bill 25 is a defence of education, a defence of the proposition that children in publicly funded schools are there to learn to think, to question, and to reach their own conclusions. They are not there to be shaped into activists for causes their government has preselected. They are not raw material for a political project.

The NDP wanted to weaponize the curriculum. They wanted to weaponize Alberta's children, to take young people who have not yet had the chance to form their own views and channel them systemically and by design towards political action aligned with the NDP's world view. Bill 25 says clearly and permanently: not in Alberta schools, not on this government's watch, not on my watch, and not ever.

Bill 25 is legislation grounded in a straightforward belief that every child in Alberta deserves a school environment that is safe, focused on learning, and genuinely neutral. I introduced this bill because parents deserve that assurance, teachers deserve that clarity, and students deserve that foundation. Again, the criticism, I understand, has been fierce from advocacy groups, civil society organizations, and from the very floor of this Assembly. I have tried to address it all here this evening directly and by name because Albertans deserve to know the difference between political rhetoric arguments and the actual legislative fact.

The NDP wanted a curriculum that made children into activists. We chose a curriculum that makes children into thinkers. That is the choice Bill 25 reaffirms, and on that I will not be moved, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

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

**Mr. Ip:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's be clear. The only folks who are being ideological and playing politics and weaponizing education are the UCP. To answer the minister of education, professional teaching standards already exist. The mechanisms are already there.

The minister says Bill 25 is to create clarity. Well, I would say that it makes everything less clear. What Bill 25 does is it pushes a false narrative that makes the public education system look broken, that there is somehow this groundswell of folks who are concerned about how teachers are teaching. Let me just share with you that I have not in all of my time as an MLA or as a school board trustee encountered this as a major concern for parents.

This is part of a broader pattern that's troubling. This is just another step in the government's strategy. What they're doing is they're starving the education system, sowing mistrust in the education system, and purposely breaking it so that it's easier to introduce private alternatives. We've seen the strategy that this government is basically doing with public education within health care, and it's become quite clear that it's their intention in education as well. It's also no coincidence, Mr. Speaker, that it's now codified through legislation that municipal reserve land reserved for public education will be opened up to other private school alternatives or private education alternatives.

**10:20**

I also want to point out that they're introducing a bill under false pretenses. Bill 25 is presented as a bill to remove politics and ideology from classrooms, but classrooms in Alberta are not the caricature this government seems to suggest. Teachers are not standing in front of the room trying to indoctrinate children. Schools are not the front line of some culture war, no matter how often that idea gets fed through social media and repeated and shared online. So yes, I take issue, Mr. Speaker, with their framing of the issues.

Of course, teachers should be objective. Of course, classrooms should be free from bias; they already are. No one is arguing otherwise. But that standard already exists, and teachers are supposed to be unbiased in the way that they teach. If there's an issue, the mechanisms already exist for school leaders to address that. Teachers work under a defined professional code of conduct. They already carry serious ethical responsibilities. They already know that their job is to help students think, question, examine, and learn.

So Bill 25 is confusing to me. I'm not quite sure why this is necessary considering all the problems we have in education. It treats the teaching profession as though there is some widespread

failure of professionalism in Alberta schools, and there's no evidence of that. For the government to suggest otherwise is dishonest, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, please forgive me. Let's hear the hon. member that's been recognized. That's how we do it here.

**Mr. Ip:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This bill is nothing more than a distraction from the real problems in education. I think what it is trying to do is rather than coming clean about their dismal record in education, the UCP is trying to ask Albertans to worry about a made-up crisis while the real one keeps getting worse. There is indeed a crisis in public education, but not the one that the UCP is trying to convince you of. Anyone working in schools will tell you. Classrooms are overcrowded. Classroom complexity has never been greater. There are not enough educational assistants, not enough classroom supports. This government has never met its own targets for hiring teachers or educational assistants. Maybe they should fix that first.

There are not enough new schools opening quickly enough to keep pace with how fast Alberta is growing. This is what school boards, teachers, families have been saying for years. It's no secret. The government's own numbers show that more than 80,000 additional students have entered the system in just three years. New schools often open full on day one. In my riding of Edmonton-South West there are certain parts of the neighbourhood of Keswick where families cannot send their kids to a school that's just literally across the street because of the lack of space, and that school opened less than four years ago. School divisions try to stretch dollars and staff further than they should have to, and in many growing communities they are promised schools by the government that just aren't materializing.

Mr. Speaker, I raised the issue of the Edgemont school in my riding that was promised. It was announced in 2022 and 2023, and we're not going to see that built any time soon. Certainly, the end date is indefinite at this point. When I served as a school board trustee, building a school usually took around three years. Now it can take five years or longer. We're seeing the results of that delay: larger class sizes, students travelling long distances to go to a school outside of the neighbourhood. If you talk to my constituents, that's really the number one issue they would tell you. They want a school close to where they live.

So what does this government do? They decide to bring forward a bill that is about identity politics, flags, and an American-style culture war. You know, it's almost like they're borrowing policy ideas from their MAGA friends south of the border because Bill 25 has very little to do with education and the actual needs in the classroom. What it does do is it shifts attention away from their own abysmal record and also to centralize power.

For that reason and so many more, Mr. Speaker, I cannot support this bill. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Member for Calgary-Acadia.

**Member Batten:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to join debate in opposition to Bill 25, An Act to Remove Politics and Ideology from Classrooms and Amend the Education Act. That is a very long title, and only the last piece is correct.

I've said in this Chamber before – and I'll say it again – that kids are very cool, right? Our classrooms are full of incredible young humans who are just bursting at the seams with opportunity, and their curiosity, their capacity, and their potential is all in our hands, Mr. Speaker. So when we look at amending things as important as our Education Act, when we look at making big changes to things that have huge impact on the next generation of Albertans, it's

really important that we thoroughly consider what we're doing. We know that parents want what's best for their kids, and we want to be able to give them that chance, to give parents the chance to provide that for their children. We know that early intervention is critical. We know that brain development happens rapidly and that early intervention can shape the outcomes.

Something that you may not be aware of, Mr. Speaker, is that when a child is at 22 weeks gestation – typically, of course, ideally, that child would be in utero. However, given my experience in the NICU, these were some tiny little humans that I had the pleasure to serve. At 22 weeks gestation the human brain is smooth. Why this is important is because all of the wrinkles – you know, everyone's kind of seen a picture of a human brain before, and it's full of wrinkles. Those wrinkles don't exist at 22 weeks, and it means that the care that we provided those tiny, tiny little souls: we had to be incredibly careful because every interaction we had with them was actually setting down tracks for how they would interpret pain, how they would interpret pleasure for the rest of their lives.

You can imagine that our approach to providing care to 22-weekers was very, very specific. It met those 22-weekers exactly where they were. We provided them with the resources that they needed and not, say, the resources that we provide to a term kid because that just wouldn't make sense. And the way that NICU nurses – again, happy Nurses Week to all my fellow nurses – meet their patients where they're at: the same thing should be happening in our classrooms. When supports are put in place early, children thrive, and when they're not, gaps that might have been a sliver become larger and larger and become harder to address. Bill 25 does nothing to address these huge gaps in our education system.

Parents want what's best for their children. They want their children to feel supported. They want them to have stability and to be in responsive classrooms. This government claims that this bill will increase parental confidence through meaningful interaction. Does the government suggest that parents right now aren't meaningfully interacting in their children's education? To presume that parents aren't already engaged to their fullest is super disrespectful.

Parents want a space where their children can grow and learn and develop confidence to become great adults, great human beings, but this bill does nothing to build confidence in our system. It does nothing to provide confidence for parents even though that is one of the claims. How we'd actually build confidence in the public education system so that parents could feel confident leaving their children there knowing that they'd be in a safe, welcoming, caring environment: well, first of all, don't make it a thing to remove the word "welcoming." How ridiculous is that, Mr. Speaker?

**10:30**

We have overcrowded classrooms. We have complexities like we have never seen before, and this government chooses to chase, well, dragons, apparently. Albertans want to have confidence in the public education system. They want classrooms that are appropriately staffed and not overcrowded so that every student has a desk. They want their kids to have the resources they need. They want gaps in their development or in their ability to progress or their milestones or whatever it is that they need addressed early and addressed appropriately. They want teachers to have the resources and educational assistance, the resources so that they could do the amazing job that they want to do with our children. Our schools should be a welcoming, safe, caring, inclusive space, and some of the measures that we're seeing inside this bill are doing the opposite. It is creating fake problems and distracting from the true problems we have inside our schools.

Now most Albertan parents aren't lying awake at night worried about flags or slogans or whatever else this government has decided is a problem in our classrooms. They're really worried about whether or not their child can read at grade level. And yes, Mr. Speaker, there is a portion of addressing that inside this bill. This nice little sugar cube to go along with this incredibly, well, I'll just go with ironically named bill.

Yes, our children need more resources, more appropriate supports inside the classrooms. No one is arguing that. But we are arguing that this bill does not actually do anything for them, and it wastes time inside this Chamber, not moving forward for solutions for Albertans but instead: not sure what, actually, Mr. Speaker. The government of Alberta has a responsibility to uphold every child's right to a quality education. That means that there should be adequate staffing resources and supports in response – ideally, proactively, response to what Albertan kids need. Educators have been incredibly clear on what they need. They're not asking for more top-down interference in their classroom decisions.

Bill 25 is a reactive model centralizing power to the minister. We've seen it over and over and over again with this government. They're not actually doing the work for Albertans but instead, apparently, trying to keep their jobs by rigging a map and failing to address the very real needs of Albertan children.

With that, I recommend everyone here vote against this bill.

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

**Member Gurinder Brar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to take the members to a living room of the home of one of my constituents who invited me to their home in Calgary-North East. She said, "Gurinder, come over. People want to talk and they have questions." I went. When I walked in, it felt like so many homes in my community. There was chai on the stove, there were samosas on the table, and there was laughter in the room. Friends, neighbours, parents, grandparents all gathered in one home because they cared about their community. You could hear the cups being placed on the table. You could smell the cardamom and the chai, and you could see community coming together as one. After the greetings, the laughter, and first few stories came the questions. When are we getting the schools? Why is my child sitting in an overcrowded classroom? Instead of focusing on education, why is this government focused on politics of education?

Mr. Speaker, that is the question at the heart of Bill 25. Families in Calgary-North East are not asking this government for ideological games; they're asking for more schools. What does this UCP government bring forward? One of the most ideological bills we have ever seen in the history of this province. Classrooms are guided by professional standards. Teachers have code of conduct. Teachers are required not to take ideological advantage of the students. That is already there. This bill is not filling a gap; it is spreading fear. This bill does not fix overcrowding, does not hire enough teachers, does not bring Alberta to the national average in per-student funding.

Mr. Speaker, why would a government look at words like "welcoming" and "respectful" and decide these words need to go? In my community we have children from many faiths, many backgrounds, many languages, many cultures. We have children whose parents came from India, Pakistan, Philippines, Somalia, Afghanistan, Syria, Ukraine, and all across the globe. Many of these parents work long hours, drive taxis, run small businesses, work in warehouses, clean buildings at night, and pack lunches in the morning. When they send their children to school, they want their children to feel welcomed and safe. I ask this government: what message are you sending when you strike out those words? Because

the words we choose in the law do matter. A welcoming school is not ideology. A respectful classroom is not ideology. A safe learning environment is not ideology. It is the basic promise of public education.

Mr. Speaker, this bill bans flags other than Alberta and Canadian flags. I ask again: is this the crisis in our classrooms? Is this what the teachers asked for? Is this what parents are worried about in my riding? They are worried about their child's class being too full. There are not enough educational assistants, and when will this government build the schools we need? These are their priorities, and this government wants to talk about flags while parents are worried about funding. This government wants to talk about ideology when teachers are talking about complexity. This government wants to talk about control while families are talking about overcrowding.

When I speak to teachers, they are asking for help. What does this bill do to help them? Does it lower class sizes? No. Does this provide stable, predictable funding? No. Does it restore respect for the profession? Not at all. Instead, it tells teachers . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** The hon. member has given what must be a great speech because people on both sides want to help the hon. member out, but why don't we recognize just the hon. member who has the floor. This is for both sides.

Hon. member, carry on.

**Member Gurinder Brar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Instead, it tells teachers: "Be careful. Watch your words. This government is watching." That is not how you create a strong public education system. That is how you create fear.

Mr. Speaker, people in my constituency are tired of this government's priorities. They see a government that moves quickly when it wants more control. They see a government that moves quickly when it wants to pick a fight. They see a government that moves quickly when it comes to distract them, but when Calgary-North East asks for new schools, this government barely takes a step. When parents ask for smaller class sizes, there are excuses. When teachers asked for better supports, the treasury is empty. That is the problem with this government. Bill 25 is not an education plan; it is a distraction plan: distraction from overcrowded classrooms, distraction from a historic teachers strike, distraction from the fact that Alberta students have been among the lowest funded in the country under this corrupt UCP government.

10:40

When that group of community members gathered over chai and samosas, they were not confused. They knew exactly what was happening. Teachers need resources. They knew students need supports. They knew that schools need staff. That is what real education systems look like, Mr. Speaker. Students learn about difficult topics, and this government has a problem with that as well. They learn about residential schools. They learn about racism, fascism, terrorism, censorship, nationalism, ultra-nationalism, genocide, and war.

When this government talks about presenting both sides or enforcing neutrality through legislation, I have some serious questions. I want this government and this minister and this Premier to tell me: what are the both sides of residential schools? What are the both sides of genocide? What are the both sides of fascism? The role of education is not to sanitize the truth, Mr. Speaker. It is to teach the students how to face the truth. That is how we build a better future. I want to say this clearly. Teaching children to respect others is not political, but using legislation to intimidate teachers is political. Teaching children the truth about history is not political.

Removing “welcoming” and “respectful” from the Education Act is political. Teaching children that every student belongs is not political. Centralizing power in the minister’s office is political.

Public education should be a promise, a promise that no matter where a child is born, no matter how much money their parents make, no matter what language is spoken at home, that child will have a fair chance. In Calgary-North East, that promise matters deeply. Many of our families came here with very little. They told their children: study hard; education will open the doors. But when those children go to overcrowded schools, when the teachers are overwhelmed, when new communities grow faster than school construction, that promise starts to break. That is why this debate matters.

This bill is not just a bad bill; it’s a missed opportunity. Imagine if this government had brought forward a bill to reduce class sizes. Imagine if this government had brought forward a bill to guarantee timely assessment for children. Imagine if this government had brought forward a bill to hire more teachers, more educational assistants, and more support for kids. That’s what leadership would have looked like. But that’s missing, Mr. Speaker. Alberta deserves better. Under the Alberta NDP government a better vision and a better future will be possible because we believe in funding schools where families are waiting. We believe in hiring teachers. We believe that public education is not a place for UCP culture wars. It is a place where children come to learn, to grow, and dream.

Mr. Speaker, I think back to that living room in Calgary-North East, the chai, the samosas, the tough questions. They were not asking for too much, just good schools, safe classrooms, and a better future. On their behalf I tell this government that this bill does not meet their demands. I oppose this bill, and I ask all members to oppose this bill.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Eggen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that it’s a short opportunity to speak on Bill 25. I might just caution the minister and anyone else who is using time allocations that when you do so, you only give us 60 minutes to debate the bill, yet the minister took 20 minutes of that time to rehash all of his arguments that we already heard in second and in committee as well. I mean, just, you know, in the spirit of good governance and good crickets, don’t do that, right? You put time allocations on, then don’t suck up all the time after for yourself, really.

With that in mind we know that just this last fall we had perhaps the most disruptive labour action in the history of Alberta: 50,000 teachers choosing to go on strike for better conditions for the classroom, to address classroom complexity, to have more respect for the profession of teachers, and to ensure long-term stability for public education here in the province of Alberta. This government chose to not do any of those things but instead chose to force the end of that strike using the notwithstanding clause for the first time in Alberta’s history. What a way to fracture the relationship between teachers and support staff and parents and students as well than to do that very thing last fall.

What you should do afterwards – free advice – is to try to build some of those bridges to say that we will invest in public education, that we do respect teachers, and that we will make a future for our children in our public schools. But oh, no. This government chooses instead to drop Bill 25, an act to remove politics and ideology and flags and bathrooms and whatever else from our schools, right? An absolute insult to the grave situation that needed to be addressed in regard to the relationship between this government and our teachers, our students, our parents, and the general public.

Talk about a failure, Mr. Speaker. This bill is absolutely a failure in all respects. It talks about flags; it talks about, you know, what all else when the actual issue is that we need to invest in our education system. We still are one of the very lowest funding jurisdictions for education in the entire country. We used to be near the top. We should always be near the top. We are an affluent province that recognizes the most important asset that we have is not the oil in the ground, but it’s the human resources and particularly our children’s education that we must invest in during good times and bad to ensure a decent future for everyone.

But oh, no. The UCP government takes it and burns it all up with Bill 25, insulting the teachers, insulting the profession, and making a mockery of what everyone else knows needs to be done after that divisive strike here last fall in Alberta. Build those bridges and make a commitment to long-term investments. Make sure that you are actually looking after and not dissing teachers left, right, and centre, which is what this provincial government does. They left it for, like, 24 hours, and then they started the culture war again, Mr. Speaker. Whoop-de-do.

Now, if you bother going to a school, which I seriously doubt any of these members do, you will be told exactly what’s going on. People are demoralized. Parents are confused. Students are still feeling the effects of the strike. They’re feeling the effects of COVID. They’re feeling the effects of not, you know, necessarily reading to grade level and so forth. That’s the thing we need to invest in. We don’t need to invest in culture wars, making attacks on our public education system at the very point when we need to build those bridges. Mr. Speaker, it’s not asking much, but it’s asking for consistency. We need to make sure of not just building the physical infrastructure but building that cultural infrastructure of respecting public education.

It’s the thing that benefited most all of us more than anything else, that chance to have a high-quality access to public education regardless of how much money you make, regardless of where you live, and regardless of what choices you’re making in the future about your career and so forth. That’s the way we succeed as a society. That’s the way I succeeded, certainly, coming to a public school, getting that public education, and being able to use the reading, writing, arithmetic, and critical thinking skills that we all need to be successful. We owe that to all of our students here in this province, not just some of them. We owe it regardless of where they live geographically in this province, and we owe it to them regardless of how much their families have in their pockets.

It’s an uphill battle, but we’re here to help, quite frankly. We know how public education needs to be respected and to be funded and to know that that funding and that structure is there for them as well. Our government: we built a lot of schools. We funded them. We didn’t just talk about them. We didn’t just put up a sign that said, “School coming soon,” waiting for that school. Then sometimes that sign even falls down in the field and there’s still no school. We built those schools. Some of them were started by the Conservatives and many of them were started by our government, and we left many of those projects for, hopefully, this government to build as well. That’s the way you do it.

**10:50**

You don’t do it by setting up boundaries, by setting up culture wars between people. You do it together as a province, as a people, as a society. That’s what public education is all about, and I expect nothing else.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Williams:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been a passionate evening of debate surrounding An Act to Remove Politics and Ideology from Classrooms and Amend the Education Act, 2026. However, it will see its day tomorrow for more debate, and I move that we adjourn debate on this bill for now.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

### Bill 32

#### Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2026

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

**Mr. Amery:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move third reading of Bill 32, the Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2026.

Bill 32 proposes a very simple but an important change. It seeks to increase the number of electoral divisions from 89 to 91. Mr. Speaker, as I said during second reading, a fair distribution of electoral divisions is essential to the democratic process. Now, that means more than just looking at representation through a very narrow lens. It means that every Albertan, no matter where they live in this province, should have effective representation, and that requires consideration of a comprehensive set of factors. It's essential that we ensure effective representation in Alberta's electoral boundaries as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We must ensure that Albertans continue to receive strong and effective representation in this Assembly.

The amendments in the bill are common sense. The Electoral Boundaries Commission's majority indicated that they "would have been able to provide Albertans with more effective representation had the [Legislative Assembly of Alberta provided] an additional two [electoral divisions]." In fact, Mr. Speaker, in the report itself the commission lamented the loss of two rural seats. The report of the commission concluded that adding two rural seats would have been helpful. The report was very clear. In order to do a proper job, the commission needed an increase that was consistent with the population growth of Alberta or at least somewhat representative of the substantial growth that this great province has seen in recent years.

To put it simply, Bill 32 embraces the recommendations of the commission report, and doing anything else would be inappropriate and it would disrespect and disregard the recommendations and the solution put forward by the hon. Justice Dallas Miller in recommendation 5 of that commission's report. That's why we're making this amendment, Mr. Speaker. That's why it's put here on the Assembly floor, and it's why this Assembly has already taken steps to support the work by establishing a select special committee to engage an independent panel of advisers.

If Bill 32 is passed, the independent panel will divide Alberta into 91 proposed electoral districts and incorporate the recommendations of the commission, in particular as outlined by the hon. Justice Dallas Miller's addendum into the report. Mr. Speaker, Bill 32 is as straightforward as it gets, and that's why all members of this House should support Bill 32 to ensure that Albertans, no matter where they live, continue to have effective representation in this House.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move third reading of Bill 32.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Third reading of Bill 32 has been moved. Are there any speakers? The hon. Member for . . .

**Some Hon. Members:** Question.

**The Speaker:** Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

**Ms Ganley:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and have another opportunity to speak to Bill 32, a bill which is very short and not about anything that it's actually about, which is an interesting thing with this government. They tend to do this with their bills, right? Hon. members were just speaking to the last bill, Bill 25, which purports to be about school safety. It does nothing to improve school safety. This bill purports to be about the number of ridings. Really, it's about allowing MLAs to draw the electoral boundaries. If it was about just the number of ridings, the UCP could have achieved that very easily by simply introducing a bill earlier that did this and then asking the same commission to go back and reconsider how they might redivide the boundaries. It's an issue that is quite fundamental to Albertans.

The UCP's stated goal – their stated goal – the thing they have said explicitly on the record, is that they want to dilute urban votes, that they want the votes of people in cities to count less. I don't really think that's a great goal, but there are significant concerns, Mr. Speaker, arising in terms of that not being the goal at all. I don't think that is what we are going to see as the outcome from this process, and I can speak to it fairly directly because I happen to be one of the people who is on the select special committee that has the special advisory something reporting to it. When we wrap everything up in a series of fancy legalistic terms and give them all 18 titles, that's not normally because we want the public to understand what it is that we're talking about. In fact, it's clear to me that this government does not want the public to understand what they are talking about. They want the public to look anywhere else but at what they're doing.

What they are doing is setting up a committee where the MLAs draw the boundaries, and that's a conflict of interest. It's a conflict of interest. The voters pick the MLAs, not the MLAs the voter. That's how it's supposed to work. That's how it's always worked. It's important that it continue to work that way because that is how we as politicians are held accountable. We are the people who are elected. We are the people who get to stand here, who get to speak in this place, but our power doesn't derive from us. It derives from them, or it's supposed to. The UCP doesn't like that. It doesn't like that the power derives from them, so they have done a series of things. They have voted to allow secret meetings. They have denied the public the right to the letter sent by the Chief Justice of this province indicating that she does not want to participate in this process.

I, too, Mr. Speaker, would just as soon not participate in this process because I think it is illegitimate, but I do think that we owe a duty to Albertans. So we will stand in our places and we will observe what is happening, and I hope that people are observing what is happening, too. It has been a lot. Today I had the opportunity to ask about – so the Premier has stated on the record that what is explicitly on the pages of this bill is true. She has stated on the record that this is just about inserting two additional seats and that they will use the maps that were drawn by the independent commission, the independent commission whose report is thrown out by this bill and the motion and the committee and all the things, that those maps will be the starting point.

11:00

My colleague and I asked the chair of the committee doing the work, “The Premier has said this; it’s not totally explicit in the motion; can you just confirm for us?” as we discussed the mandate of the committee. He was unable to answer five times. It seems that the UCP members on that committee are confused about whether or not the Premier’s statements were accurate. Mr. Speaker, that’s a little troubling because when people are telling the truth, it’s pretty easy to just be like: hey, they’re telling the truth. That’s very straightforward. It’s easy to remember the truth because it’s a thing that actually happened. It’s not so easy to remember other things that are not the truth. So that is really, really troubling, that they were unable to confirm that.

It is really, really troubling that members have consistently voted to hide from the public the deliberations, that members did not feel that it was necessary for the advisory panel to be required to report any attempt at interference. Mr. Speaker, that is particularly relevant in this instance because there is a lot of collateral evidence of attempted interference. The minority report delivered by the commission has maps that appear to have fallen out of the clear, blue sky. They’re reflected nowhere on the record. Despite there being a majority report, the chair makes an addendum, and the reason the chair makes that addendum is because there were so many questionable things about the minority suddenly reversing themselves and maps that were being circulated before they had been put out with the commission report that he felt the need to intervene. That, I think, is troubling. It should be troubling to anyone.

I think the last thing to note on this is that the UCP has stated explicitly – ministers, Premier, many of them – that this is about the need for 91 seats because that’s what the commission recommended. Mr. Speaker, allow me to state clearly for the record that that is not what the commission recommended. The addendum to the majority report is one page. It’s only one page, and it is incredibly clear in that addendum – and I have put it on the record before – that the chair bends over backwards saying: “That is why I am alone in making this recommendation. My majority colleagues could not support me in this recommendation.” But the government is willing to rely on what is, essentially, a typo to try and claim that it is a majority recommendation.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that they are just mistaken, but the Justice minister is a lawyer, and it’s one page long, and the intent is incredibly clear. It really strains credulity that he actually believes that. That is all I will say about that.

It’s pretty clear to me, and I think it’s clear to anyone who’s read the one-page addendum, that the chair had no intention of suggesting that the majority wanted 91 seats. That’s not what they said. They say, Mr. Speaker, that every man is entitled to his own opinion, but he is not entitled to his own set of facts. I would like for the UCP to come to understand that they are not entitled to their own set of facts. They might wish that the majority of the commission had recommended 91 seats, but that’s not what happened. That’s not what happened. The majority of the commission recommended maps, and that is why they had to throw out the commission’s report and to bring in this process, which is considered to be illegitimate by not just the opposition but by professors and judges and lawyers and people all throughout the province.

Yeah. It’s incredibly problematic, Mr. Speaker. This government: if they really thought that their actions were okay, if they really thought that their actions would be fair, why would they be running around and telling people that the chair said something he most clearly did not? If you’re doing the right thing, you can be honest

about it, and when you’re not honest about it, that’s a pretty clear signal that you’re not doing the right thing. I would suggest that this UCP government try to do a lot better.

Thank you.

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

**Ms Chapman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to rise and offer comments on Bill 32, Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2026. I’m sure they’ll be excellent comments. This is a totally normal time of day for me to put forward coherent arguments.

**Mr. Eggen:** You’re doing okay so far.

**Ms Chapman:** Thank you. So far so good.

It has been interesting going through this process with my constituents. I have had quite a few people reach out to my office, of course, with concerns about gerrymandering. Of course, every person who comes, I let them know that it’s actually meant to be ‘Gerry-mandering’ because it’s a portmanteau, and the fellow’s name was Gerry. That was the name. But we call it gerrymandering. Yeah. It was Gerry. It should be ‘Gerry-mandering.’

**Mr. Nenshi:** You know everything.

**Ms Chapman:** Thank you.

I also have a list of other awesome portmanteaus. I’m just going to give you my top three, and then I’ll get back into the bill. It’s hangry, frenemy, and spork. Those are the favourite ones of all time.

Now on to Bill 32. Look, the boundary process – let’s make politics boring again, Mr. Speaker. That’s the slogan I think that I might run under in my next campaign: let’s make politics boring again. The boundaries process is exactly the example of something that should be just a very sleepy affair. As far as I understand it, it has been a very sleepy affair in Alberta historically. This is something that happens every eight to 10 years, as I gather. After, you know, around two terms of a government we redraw maps. We do that to accommodate shifts in population. That process looks like – we passed the enabling legislation. That happened at the end of 2024. I think it was December 2024 when that legislation finished its process, and it directed 89 proposed electoral divisions.

There are a few other things, of course, in that enabling legislation that directs the work of the boundaries commission and the factors that they’re meant to consider when they are redrawing those maps. Those were sparsity, density, and rate of growth of the population, communities of interest, geographical features – heck, it always drives me nuts when they cut a community in half; it’s weird – availability and means of communication and transportation, desirability of understandable and clear boundaries, and I think this last one is maybe what threw the government: any other factors the commission considers appropriate. I do wonder if that is what caused the UCP to so horribly misrepresent or misinterpret what the final boundaries report told them.

We’re in this process. We have our enabling legislation. It has directed 89 proposed electoral divisions. It’s really clear. At the end of 2024, of course, the UCP is fully, completely, rabidly aware of the population growth that’s happened in our province. I know that because I was in here in the fall of 2024. You know, numerous members opposite would take any opportunity – I had to listen to the education minister talk so many times about how much the population had grown, huge explosion in population: “Oh, it’s so hard to keep up with building all the schools we need because so many people came to Alberta. We just can’t. Just pack them all into

the same number of classrooms. Just make it work.” The awareness, without question, was there. We knew there was this huge population growth. The government decided 89 seats. We moved forward.

**11:10**

The next step is that we form this commission. We do this bipartisan model. I’ve learned that this is not the way everywhere does it, but we have this bipartisan model. The UCP appoints two people. The NDP appoints two people. I think the UCP appoints the fifth guy, too, the judge. But he’s a judge, so we have faith in the neutrality there. Then this commission spends a year just doing consultation, just criss-crossing the province. They go everywhere.

I think that just about every member in this Chamber would have gone before the boundaries commission to make a submission, to talk about the needs of their ridings. That was a super interesting process for me. I’ve never done it before, and I think I’ll probably do it every time now because I was like: oh, this is kind of nice that they want to know, that they come and they ask us our opinion on all of those factors that relate to our communities, how to keep communities of interest together. They had super smart questions for me about how people move around in my communities, you know, what kinds of service they use. We talked about demographic similarities in our communities and how in some ridings it can be challenging because one side of the river can have a completely different demographic than the other side of the river. Of course, something even that small can make a difference in terms of how well or how effectively you’re able to represent your constituents.

After they do that, there are hundreds of hours of public consultation. They produce an interim report, and at this point everything in this process is tickety-boo. The map is produced. It has 89 seats. All commission members support it. They all come out and say that, yes, they’re happy about this. They’ve done this, like, really, really difficult work. I remember saying this to them when I was before them for my presentation, that, wow, I would not like to have sat where they sat. What difficult decisions they have to make, Mr. Speaker, because the way populations have changed in Alberta does not make for easy decisions. Anyone who has lived here certainly for as long as I have, and I’ve spent my whole life here – like, west Calgary has got to be twice as big as it was when I was a kid. It’s still kind of surprising to me that outside of the Ring Road exists. For me the city is all inside the Ring Road. If I have to go to the outside of the Ring Road, I feel like I’m going to the country.

We know that our cities are having these enormous booms, and we know that our rural areas are struggling. We see that in their schools, Mr. Speaker. You know, we have these classrooms that are just bursting at the seams in Calgary, and in rural areas we have communities that are dying because they can’t keep their school open. If you don’t have enough kids, your school closes. That can be the end of a community, and this is happening under the tenure of a government who claims to be on the side of rural Albertans. I’ll be frank. I’m not seeing it. I’m not seeing the policy, the job creation. I’m not seeing any work that’s actually being done to ensure that our rural areas are still healthy, well-served, growing communities.

It’s a very difficult job that the commission had to do, but they did an excellent job of it. They produced the final report, and the next step should have been the next most boring step in this whole process, which is that the report should have come before the Legislature, and we should have voted to accept it. Period. End of story. This is where the story should have ended because that’s how the process has always worked.

That’s how the process works everywhere else. We have an independent commission. They do this incredibly hard work. They make the difficult decisions. They produce a fair and reasonable set of maps, and we all accept it because it is ridiculous to suggest that we should be the people who draw the maps. We are right next door to America. Like, we can see what it leads to when politicians are allowed to gerrymander – I’m sorry; ‘Gerry-mander’ – their ridings.

Mr. Speaker, it’s an abrogation of democracy and, honestly, I never thought I would see the day in Canada. I’m disgusted. I’m absolutely disgusted. I think this is a terrible piece of legislation. I think this government should have voted in support to accept the majority recommendations of this commission.

I know I have colleagues who also want to offer comments, so I will leave it at that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Eggen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, when we’re dealing with Bill 32, this elections boundaries commission . . . [A timer sounded] What was that? No. It’s a mistake. Let’s keep going. Let’s keep going.

**The Speaker:** We should all agree that we’re going to ignore that. I don’t know why that happened. You should continue.

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to clear things up here a little bit, because Bill 32, the Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2026, is nothing that we’ve ever seen here in the province of Alberta, so we need to dissect why this happened and why we are in this situation here today. When we started the electoral boundary process – it’s a normal thing that happens every eight or nine years – redrawing the maps for population, population changes, population growth, what have you. Then they have a commission that helps to do so.

This is the second commission that I’ve seen, and I was actually really impressed with this particular commission because they did quite a thorough job. They covered a lot of geography. They literally had thousands of presentations both in person and on paper and so forth, and they came up with lots of good information. When they had their first iteration of their report, they were very proud to say that we unanimously have agreed to this first version of the map. Each of the boundary commissioners did so. That doesn’t happen very often, if ever: all five, a unanimous decision to agree to the first version of the map.

What happened in between I’m not entirely sure, but we can look at some of the clues, kind of like Sherlock Holmes, to see what happened. The first thing that I think happened is that after the first iteration and the first go-through, this UCP government thought: “You know what? We’ve got this thing in the bag, right? We don’t need to work hard or actually do presentations and so forth, because I think we probably have it all sewn up. Nudge, nudge, wink, wink.” They didn’t really – I noticed. I was around. We went to do presentations in Edmonton here, and other people talked about it and said: “Where’s the UCP? They don’t seem to be, like, super on this project.”

So the first map comes out. They do a great job. They literally interview thousands of people. I mean, there are always things that you might want to see and change and so forth, but generally I thought: yeah; this doesn’t look too bad. Then suddenly you could see it on their faces. I am a student of, you know, human nature, and I could read it all over the members’ faces when that first iteration came out, and they went: oh, my gosh, right? This is not what we had in the bag. This is something completely different. So they got on the job, they desperately hustled around and put people on to the

second tour, for sure. I saw definitely different people, but there were also different things going on, Mr. Speaker.

For example, people were making presentations with maps that we hadn't seen before, and some of them very much resembled the maps that the government MLAs were presenting. You know, it all seemed to be coming down the same sort of a pipeline of maps and the way the maps were drawn and all of this kind of thing. The second iteration of the report came out. It was still a majority of people with the map. They made some changes, which was not part of the normal process, but they'd still come out with a majority report that was agreed on by the commissioner and the majority of the people involved.

Then on the back of this thing was this minority report, which was something completely different from what we had seen in any other iteration or anything like that, really. I'm not going to judge as to where that came from or how it came to be or who drew it. That's fine, but the government then makes a huge choice, an unprecedented choice, never done before in the province of Alberta, very rarely in the history of Canada, and said: "Oh, well, we're not accepting the boundaries commission report. We're going to set up an MLA group to draw the maps, and we'll do it sometime in the future. We're not sure when."

11:20

It wasn't a plan, Mr. Speaker. This was a car crash from the beginning, where these guys decided that they already had it in the bag. They didn't do anything. Suddenly then: oh, my God; we're driving in the ditch. And they came up with this plan, Bill 32. It's an absolute embarrassment. I've never seen people talking about gerrymandering before in the vernacular of Alberta language, but they sure as heck are doing that now. They're talking about it a lot because – you know what? – it's associated with cheating, and at the very heart of a government, the very heart of governance is to make sure that people are acting in good faith to the best of their abilities. Sometimes people make mistakes in government. Sometimes, you know, that thing happens, but at least if they're acting in good faith and they're not trying to be deceptive, then people can work with that premise and move on.

Bill 32 undermines all of those things: the idea of trust, the idea that you can trust the government to follow the processes that they expect as a governing body, as the government of Alberta. That's a problem. I'm certainly having to work to repair that trust, even though I think it's an absolute abomination that they would try to get away with something like this, but at the very base my responsibility is still for trust. So we will participate in this new version of the thing. We don't like it. It's certainly not what it should be. It's probably breaking some larger higher law, but we're going to try to work with it, and I'm going to try to work with my colleagues and my constituents to say: "Look, it's important to vote. Voting is important. Democracy is important. Yeah, it looks like someone was trying to undermine that, but we are bigger than that as Albertans."

Thank you.

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

**Member Arcand-Paul:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again to this bill, this time in third reading of Bill 32. I get up here in opposition, as my wonderful colleagues have already elucidated this evening. My concerns are rooted in the fact that thousands of Albertans have made submissions to the boundary commission, and the boundary commission did very good work in collecting those submissions and really putting together a plan for this province that

would focus on a fair, representative, nonpartisan map. This conversation today should have been one that we had in 2024.

This process, I've said it before, is illegitimate, and I'm sad to see this here in Alberta. We're seeing this right now in our neighbours to the south, and the worst of it is happening in one of the states, Tennessee. I want to draw that distinction here today because we don't want to have our processes here in Alberta fall to the same kind of partisanship that we're seeing in the United States on both sides of their political spectrum. We're seeing these conversations about redrawing boundaries to give one party over the other a certain advantage. We should be focused on representation.

I was pleased to go back to the *Hansard* and look at the transcripts from the boundary commission's submissions, and many good submissions were made, particularly from all sides of this Chamber, where we brought in the concerns of our constituents. I'm heartened to have read from the Minister of Municipal Affairs who raised major, important conversations about transportation routes and the need for effective representation to be made in rural Alberta that would link those transportation routes. I was heartened to hear and see other perspectives brought forward on different parts of Alberta, especially in northern Alberta.

But before I get into those submissions – and I want to read into the record some of the submissions that were made – I want to share a quote here from the House minority leader, Karen Camper, in Tennessee. "Let's be clear about what is happening here. This is not about decorum. This is not about rules. This is about power and control." And in that state we are seeing the worst partisanship happening, which is removing the rights of particularly Black voters in Memphis, Tennessee, from being able to participate in those elections by creating gerrymandered ridings.

Here in Alberta I'm cognizant of the law and the way that the current Election Act is drafted, in such a way that we have to make sure that communities are kept together. I'm very thankful that the Electoral Boundaries Commission did so with the parameters that were given to them back in 2024.

One thing I do want to highlight from those submissions, particularly in reading the *Hansard* transcripts, are several interactions that happened between the boundary commission and the submissions that were being made. In particular, I was heartened to hear many people advocating for the inclusion of First Nations and Métis communities in these ridings and ensuring that effective representation was made with respect to those ridings.

I do want to make note, though, that several times throughout the boundary commission process there were comments made. Particularly, I want to highlight one individual who was asked if they were Indigenous. The commissioner thanked them for their presentation because they were the first Indigenous person that appeared before that commission. That individual identified that they were not, in fact, Indigenous. So the commissioner had to apologize. Then they went on and continued that conversation. There was another, a former NDP MLA, that made a submission that mistook the Stoney Nakoda as Blackfoot, which is a giant faux pas. If you know the Stoney Nakoda and you know the Blackfoot, it's a very big faux pas. It was a constant theme that I had seen on both sides of this conversation.

We saw a UCP constituency association president highlight that there – they very rightly said that there's a large Indigenous population and Treaty 8 trading in traditional land areas.

Our constituency contains an Indigenous identity population of 54 per cent, so over half the people within our constituency have an Indigenous identity. Their interests and their influences are best suited and represented by a single representative at the Legislature.

I would submit to the commission that splitting up the constituency would have a negative impact because the First Nation bands are a large social sector that have done business largely within the traditional constituency boundaries. The main trading areas are Wabasca, High Prairie, and Slave Lake, and there is truly a long history of established trading patterns and traditional lands that they have lived on for hundreds of years. This is best maintained by keeping the constituency whole. The large population on reserves and settlements should not be split up as they identify with each other and the traditional areas they have lived on for generations.

Another UCP constituency association representative highlighted that “it is becoming more and more of a provincial responsibility, and there is a lot more of the stepping up with the province in trying to help with this.” This is talking about Indigenous matters. I want to bring these out because I do think it is an important perspective that we have in this conversation, especially around Bill 32.

I forgot to start my remarks by saying that in my profession and in my service I’ve learned many things, but the most important things are that, first of all, you don’t stand in the way of an elder and a meal, so you have to make your remarks quite brief. Then you also don’t stand in the way of the UCP and limiting debate, because they don’t want to have this conversation and ensure that we have robust debate. But we must have this robust debate because we’re all elected here to represent many, many Albertans.

I also want to bring up something that the Indigenous Bar Association of Canada raised in their written submissions to the commission. In particular, they stated:

Far too often, Indigenous voters represent a minority within existing electoral districts, resulting in their voices and priorities being diluted through the electoral process, and insufficiently reflected in provincial or national decision-making.

11:30

In the Carter decision, Reference re Provincial Electoral Boundaries, Saskatchewan, 1991, from the Supreme Court of Canada

the court emphasized the importance of having a voice in the deliberations of government, a voice which is diluted when electoral boundaries divide or marginalize communities... Other provinces have recognized the importance of Indigenous representation through electoral boundaries, including the Government of Saskatchewan (e.g., the Cumberland and Athabasca ridings that provide representation for a majority of northern and Indigenous peoples), and the Government of Manitoba (e.g., the Keewatinook, Pas-Kameesak, Flin Flon, and Thompson ridings in northern Manitoba are predominantly Indigenous).

We urge the Commission to preserve the Mackenzie riding... Indigenous voters in northern Alberta have distinct needs and are entitled to effective representation that reflects their unique cultural, economic, and governance realities.

So there were Indigenous voices that were included. Particularly, a representative of the Lesser Slave Lake Indian Regional Council highlighted:

The other thing that she was saying about how the constituencies should reflect a certain regionality in terms of the way that they work together: there’s an enormous amount of existing cooperation within this region already between the mainstream communities, the Métis settlements, and the First Nations. Those services have grown up naturally to reflect a unity that now is being divided through the proposal that has been made. I think, you know, we have to acknowledge that the boundaries to some extent are arbitrary. You have criteria that you’re trying to meet in terms of the proposal that’s in front of the commission, that

will be going to the Legislature, but it is missing I think some of these.

Mr. Speaker, I think what these all highlight to us in this place is that we have a great responsibility here to make sure that the decisions that we make and in particular our legislative offices that we empower to do this work in a nonpartisan way should be reflected in such a way.

The motion that was passed by this government just recently, a few weeks ago, and tied to this bill would raise several concerns to many Albertans, and we hear from them every single day. We get e-mails after e-mails about their concerns, and those concerns are just that they want to ensure that their voice matters, that their vote actually matters. We don’t want to create this partisanship here with the way that our ridings work, how people’s votes are perhaps not counted at the same level as their peers in other parts of this province. For us that is something that we have to raise in this debate.

Bill 32: I heard the members opposite mention, “Have we read this?” It’s a very small bill. I know not many people have the ability to read legislation like lawyers, but it is one of those things that was very clear, that this is something they could have done in 2024 and they just did not. Mr. Speaker, we’ve heard from many stakeholders that this process is not legitimate. Unfortunately, this should have been something that was contemplated prior to sending this to the first draft back in 2024.

I do take note of the several other submissions that have been made to the Electoral Boundaries Commission, and I want to read out another one here. Don’t worry, Mr. Speaker; I will table these tomorrow. Although they are public record, I will make sure that you have a copy of them.

Albertans have long considered how to improve Indigenous representation in the Legislature. Creating a new riding with a primarily Indigenous population promotes the principle of effective representation, taking into consideration factors such as geography, community interests, and minority representation.

This comes from an Indigenous law lawyer, Philippe Johnson, who wrote to the commission in those same conversations that he was having with his clients about adequate representation in the Legislature.

I have another one here from Dr. Suzanne Perkins from Canmore, who wrote to the commission and highlighted that her opinion was that

representation of this population block by a single MLA will strengthen the Indigenous views brought to the Legislature. As a clinician who has worked with Indigenous people for my whole career, I have developed the opinion that clearer voices brought from our First Nations to our governing bodies will have only positive [impacts] on the wellbeing of all, as well as being in keeping with the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Call to Action #43).

Mr. Speaker, finally, I want to highlight one more here from Public Interest Alberta, who highlighted that

the proposed riding of Mackenzie is sound. Although it will require special protection, the high Indigenous and Métis populations, combined with the regional issues and challenges with respect to accessibility and infrastructure, mean that it is a suitable candidate to be a new standalone riding.

Mr. Speaker, for these reasons, I think we should let the boundary commission do – have done – its work. This process by which the government is trying to redraw the boundaries with this typo in the report is not satisfactory. For these reasons, I can’t support this bill.

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

**Mr. Williams:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Member for Edmonton-West Henday for his comments and for substantive debate on Bill 32, which we will be returning to.

For the time being, though, I move to adjourn debate on Bill 32.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

**Mr. Williams:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been another terrific late-night sitting with lots of progress, substantive debate, and we will return again to the Legislature tomorrow. Until then I move that we adjourn the Assembly until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:36 p.m.]

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