

Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, November 3, 2026

Day 64

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 31st Legislature
Second Session

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Boitchenko, Hon. Andrew, ECA, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Brar, Gurtej Singh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Campbell, Kyle, Calgary-Shaw (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
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Party standings:
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m. **Tuesday, November 3, 2026**

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Glubish: M. le Président, je suis très fier de vous présenter un groupe d'élèves de sixième année de l'école Claudette-et-Denis-Tardif. Je suis ravi qu'ils puissent profiter de leur visite de l'Assemblée législative et je suis très heureux que nous ayons pu les aider à construire une toute nouvelle école qui a ouvert ses portes l'an dernier. J'invite ces élèves à se lever et à recevoir l'accueil chaleureux de cette Assemblée.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Riverview with two, I understand.

Ms Sigurdson: That's right, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I have two school groups from the riding of Edmonton-Riverview. One group is from Grandview Heights school. There are 35 students along with their teachers and parent volunteers. Could they please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The second group I have is from Parkview school, and there are 74 students along with their teachers and parent volunteers. I was able to talk with them this morning, and they're a very engaged, interested group. Please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Next up we have St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you for the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs Sunny Johal, office manager, and Ryann Dufour-Quinney, first-year social work student. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Sinclair: Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to introduce to you and through you an amazing group of people from Big Lakes county near High Prairie. They're a collection of farmers, business leaders, elected officials, troublemakers, and maybe a couple of day drinkers. I invite them to rise and accept the warm reception of this Legislature.

Member Gurinder Brar: Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to introduce Ms Davinder Kaur, also known as Gurbaani Gill. She's a film producer, writer, and the owner of Gill Film Productions and Bol_baanii. With a creative vision rooted in Punjabi culture and storytelling, she's actively contributing to the Punjabi film and music industry. I ask Gurbaani and her friends to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Livingstone-Macleod.

Mrs. Petrovic: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you the MD of Pincher Creek. They are my most well-behaved councillors, up here for RMA right now. I ask that they please rise. We have CAO Roland Milligan. We have Reeve Rick Lemire, councillors Alan McRae, Tony Bruder, Jim Welsch, Dave Cox, John MacGarva. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Rikki McBride. She's the CEO of the Association of Alberta Registry Agents, the organization that represents Alberta's privately operated registry offices. She has held the CEO role since January 2019. I ask that she rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Ms Fir: Mr. Speaker, it's my privilege to rise to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly two amazing organizations, Megan Bishop and her team here from the Book Publishers Association of Alberta and Tracey Bodnarchuk and her amazing team here from Canada Powered by Women. Thank you for the important work both of your organizations do for our province. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation.

Mrs. Sawyer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you two delegations. The first is a delegation of 10 from the Young Agrarians, Canada's largest network supporting new and young farmers.

As well, we have eight executives, reps, and staff of Alberta's Agriculture Service Boards, all amazing advocates for our province's farmers. I ask you to please rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All roads lead to Sherwood Park, and sometimes they lead friends back for a visit. In the gallery are friends I grew up with: Greg Brettell, Jamie Barnie, and Kelly Barnie. When you sit around and talk about the good old days, it's with "falcon" awesome people like them. Greg, Jamie, and Kelly, please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce two of my constituents, Modaser Sediqi and his sister Somaya. Modaser has an interest in government, politics, and public service, so he's here today to see us all in action. I only hope that we can all show them the warm hospitality that I know we're capable of. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thousands of very proud Canadians worked all summer to make sure that they motivated folks to get out and vote to remain proud Canadians. I'm pleased to introduce two of those volunteers and organizers who are here today. They're both residents of Strathcona-Sherwood Park. I ask that Sarah Geisler and Debbie Royer rise and receive our warm welcome and appreciation.

Members' Statements

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

Judicial Independence

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More than 1 million Albertans rejected the Premier's attempt to undermine Canada's Constitution and subvert our judicial system. Let's call Referendum Question 6 for what it truly was, a blatant attempt to deceive Albertans into handing control over the courts to the Premier's office by letting her hand-pick judges with no consultation with the public, the legal profession, or other levels of government.

Albertans saw through the Premier's spin and voted against question 6. Every single riding in Edmonton, Calgary, and Lethbridge plus many more voted to protect our judicial system from a historic level of unacceptable political interference. Canada has a long tradition of legal and judicial independence. When governments go too far, it is the duty of the courts to intervene when necessary and protect the Charter and constitutional rights of our citizens.

When the courts ruled the Premier and the UCP's attack on freedom, choice, and collective bargaining unconstitutional, the Premier reached for the notwithstanding clause. When a judge said no to an independence referendum, the Premier changed the law, gave the separatists their referendum on a silver platter, and launched a legal fight against First Nations. When Justice Miller rejected the Premier's plans to gerrymander the next election, she threw out his report and ordered an unprecedented redo to try to gerrymander the whole province. Her Justice minister has placed himself above the rule of law, exempting himself from sanctions by the Law Society, all the while seizing control of the Alberta Law Foundation.

But Albertans have told the Premier what they value: an independent legal system, a judiciary that is free from political interference, and an Alberta that will follow the Constitution, respect their Charter rights, and respect the rule of law. Will the Premier finally listen?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

2026 Wildfire Season

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past Saturday the 2026 wildfire season is officially over, and the numbers are astounding. Since January Alberta Wildfire responded to over 790 wildfires that burned just under 18,000 hectares. The five-year average is 996 wildfires and more than 660,000 hectares. That's more than a 97 per cent drop in land burnt. This is the first time in 40 years that Alberta Wildfire maps showed zero activity fires in mid-August. This government put pieces in place to make sure those results happen. With a busy early season in northern Alberta our teams had the chance to showcase our province's initial attack capacity, working quickly to get the fires under control or extinguished within 24 hours of first report.

1:40

But this isn't just about putting the right people in the right place. We gave them the tools to succeed, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Wildfire expanded to seven night-vision helicopter crews so that we can fight fires around the clock, added two hoist-equipped helicopters to reach rugged terrain. We also launched the Alberta wildfire mitigation strategy to cut risk before fires start, making the municipalities who are picking up the phone more of a reality than actually spending their budget.

Our work doesn't just stop at the end of the season. We have built more than 6,200 hectares near 24 at-risk communities to reduce hazardous fuels in surrounding areas. We've also built 1,000 hectares of fireguards since April of 2025 with more to be announced in the upcoming months. Albertans remember what's at stake and so does our government.

To every firefighter, pilot, partner who answered this call this season: thank you. Under this UCP government we don't leave Albertans' safety to chance. We plan, train, and take action to protect Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Electoral Boundaries Committee Report

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, this government dropped their new electoral boundaries report yesterday, and it's no exaggeration to say that it's just plain bad for democracy. It is, without a doubt, gerrymandering. Here in Canada it's normally the case that electoral boundaries are changed on a regular basis, and it's usually done in a nonpartisan way. It's gone on this way in Canada for decades.

We started out here with a fair process, an approach that included consultation. Thousands of Albertans across the province responded, and we got a fair report. But the UCP took one look at it and decided to throw the whole thing out. Instead, they set up a new panel made up of a UCP majority membership, of course, that did not consult anyone, lacked transparency, and that pushed and shoved through a whole new set of boundaries which were so obviously gerrymandered to help this government win. When one party tries to pass boundaries that everyone and their dog can see is in their own self-interest, it's cheating.

It's no surprise how we got here, Mr. Speaker. Just look at Calgary-Shaw recently to see what's motivating this UCP government in their attempt to gerrymander Alberta. The Alberta NDP won the so-called safest seat in urban conservative Alberta because Albertans are sick and tired of this Premier and their government.

What do you do when you know you're losing and you're unethical? You change the rules of the game. That's what this government is doing, and it's wrong. Every Albertan should feel wronged by this UCP attack on democracy. It's time to put a stop to it.

The Speaker: We give a lot of latitude with members' statements, which we did. Some of the statements, the words used in there, wouldn't make it through question period.

Nonetheless, next member's statement belongs to the hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Canada Powered by Women

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Energy is at the heart of Alberta's prosperity and communities. It powers our homes, supports our industries, and sustains jobs and investment across this province. At its core our energy sector helps support the everyday lives of Albertans, and everyone with a stake in it deserves a voice. That includes the women who work in the sector, who lead in it, and who depend on it every day.

Since 2019 Canada Powered by Women has been making sure those voices are heard. This organization represents engaged women across the country and champions their perspective in shaping a prosperous and sustainable energy future. Together they have engaged 6.5 million Canadian women, nearly 40 per cent of the female population, giving them a real say in how this country builds its energy future. That research carries a clear message. Canada has the resources and must be ready to lead the way. Women want governments to lead, to act quickly, and to set clear timelines and approvals. That is how Canada's energy

potential translates into completed projects and how those projects deliver real benefits for families and communities.

Mr. Speaker, our government is already doing that work. Pacific link will connect Alberta's energy to more customers world-wide. We have set a 120-day timeline and a single review process for major projects, and we have partnered with Saskatchewan and Northwest Territories to advance nuclear energy and strengthen grid reliability.

When I met with Canada Powered by Women, I heard directly how much women in Alberta value affordable, reliable energy. They support removing interprovincial trade barriers and expanding pipelines and export infrastructure to strengthen Alberta's energy security and reach new markets. I'm so proud to recognize Canada Powered by Women today for ensuring that the perspectives of women in Alberta are not only heard but are brought into the rooms where decisions are made. Their collective voice is helping build a stronger and more prosperous Alberta and Canada.

Calgary's Electoral Boundaries

Mr. Shepherd: Back in '22 the Premier made a bold statement that she could lose half the UCP seats in Calgary and still get elected on the rural vote. Didn't sit so well with her 11 ministers in, well, Calgary, who were less than thrilled at being volunteered as tribute, but the Premier, at least back then, was a woman of her word.

In '23 five ministers went under the campaign bus as the UCP won government with the thinnest margin in Alberta's history. The Premier took that as a mandate, plunged into far-right public policy she never campaigned on like abandoning the RCMP and the Canada pension plan. Calgary MLAs and ministers: well, they had to smile through gritted teeth as she played permissive parent while their colleagues and party members promoted antivax conspiracies, racist policies, and, yes, separatism, knowing that for some only a few hundred votes stood between them and defeat.

Then the referendum, the Premier's play to pander to the separatists who put her in power. They had to stumble through talking points about a sovereign Alberta in a united Canada, tap dance around questions designed to scapegoat immigrants, people who looked like their constituents or in some cases themselves, not allowed to say a word against the Premier, who seemed to think their seats and their supporters were expendable.

Then the reckoning, an Alberta NDP win in what they wrongly assumed was the most conservative urban seat in Canada, Calgary-Shaw. One month later Calgary voted definitively against the Premier's referendum, 80 per cent to stay in Canada, a solid swing against her plans for separatism in slow motion because Calgarians have had enough. Yet these members remain chained to the Premier, lining up in lockstep to vote against our motion denouncing separatism rather than fight for what their constituents actually want: reliable public health care, good public schools, affordable groceries.

They're hanging their hopes on gerrymandering their seats, cheating in the next election to save them from the very voters they're supposed to represent. That's their choice, but Calgarians get one, too, and they can choose a better government and MLAs . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, you actually made comments about members cheating. You just don't get to do that, so I'll ask you to withdraw that and then continue your statement.

Mr. Shepherd: Certainly, Mr. Speaker. I apologize and withdraw.

But voters in Calgary get one, too. They can choose a better government and MLAs who put their interests first, and we're ready whether the UCP chooses to rig the election or not.

Public Health Care

Dr. Metz: Mr. Speaker, nearly 6 in 10 Albertans rejected the idea of the government opting out of federal health care programs in the October referendum. Albertans voted for public health care that supports patients and families by respecting the principles of universal health care and the Canada Health Act. Albertans sent a clear message to the government. They want the Premier and cabinet to focus on improving public health care, not dismantling it. They want more doctors and nurses recruited, primary care expanded, and wait times reduced. Albertans believe that public health care should be based on need, not on the ability to pay. They do not want a health care system that leaves more and more Albertans behind.

Albertans are proud Canadians. They do not want an American-style health care system. They do not want two-tier health care. They do not want the government picking ideological fights with patients waiting in pain, struggling to see a family doctor, waiting for an ambulance, or sitting for hours in emergency departments.

Instead of fixing the health care system, the UCP government continues to break it while pandering to separatists and ideology. Albertans want the government to leave the fundamental principles of universal health care alone and invest in public surgical capacity, address bottlenecks across the health system, and work with patients, providers, and communities on real solutions. It's time to get down to the real work of making health care better for all Albertans.

1:50 Oral Question Period

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

Electoral Boundaries Committee Report

Mr. Nenshi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The boundary commission report is out, and as we suspected, the UCP government couldn't help themselves. The Premier swore up and down last spring that she was only making minor changes to add back a seat for the Minister of Finance and one other and she would accept Justice Miller's recommendation 5, which specifically said: don't touch anything south of Airdrie. Can the Premier please tell us where Calgary and Lethbridge are on the map in relation to Airdrie?

The Speaker: That question – the question itself – didn't have anything to do with government policy, and if you want to continue, you need to get back on government policy.

Go ahead, Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're looking forward to debating the motion tomorrow, but I hope that the member opposite has had a chance to read Judge Miller's report. He starts off by saying that "much of the objection to our interim report is based on the loss of two rural seats." He said, "I lament this, as do my fellow Commissioners." And his recommendation did talk about increasing the number of seats from 89 to 91 to restore those two rural seats and acknowledge that it would have some impact on some of the other seats as a result. He also gave additional suggestions for the commission to look at, and I'm pleased to see that that occurred.

Mr. Nenshi: This morning when the Premier was asked why the panel exceeded its mandate and went south of Airdrie, the Premier said that she needed to, quote, talk to the lawyers, unquote, about their interpretation. Why is a lawyer needed to interpret this sentence from Justice Miller? "Restoration of the two electoral divisions should have no impact on any electoral division in Airdrie or containing territory south of Airdrie's southernmost border, with

the exception of Drumheller-Stettler." Why does the Premier need a lawyer to interpret that part of the recommendation?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the answer is right in the statement that he mentioned. It was: don't impact the Airdrie ridings. As you may recall, the minority report suggested, I believe, three different ridings for Airdrie. That was rejected. My read of that is that he suggested not going back to that. But he did make other suggestions that the commission should look at about ways in which they could look at hybrid ridings, and we'll be able to have a full debate tomorrow about what it is the new commission, or the new advisory group, looked at based on some of the things that Judge Miller suggested.

Mr. Nenshi: Of course, the very next phrase is: or anything south of Airdrie. The Premier is not reading into the whole thing.

Look, the whole purpose of this ridiculous exercise was to save the Finance minister's seat. He's now got a seat that's 44 per cent below the average population. That is a lot of work to save a seat for a minister who couldn't even carry the vote for Canada in his own riding. Yet it's clear that the commission took instruction from the government to start saving other ministers. Does the Premier expect Albertans to believe it's just a coincidence that every single change the commission recommends attempts to save a UCP minister?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I see the member opposite continues to disparage the work of an appeals court judge who has served this province incredibly well over almost two decades. As he should understand, the process is this. There are two members appointed by the NDP, two members appointed by the UCP. They will have differences of opinion, and it is up to the judge to hear and consider the views, look at what Judge Miller said, and make the recommendations that he believes are suitable, and that's what he did.

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

Mr. Nenshi: The Premier is trying to hide behind a judge when her government spent the entire spring disparaging Justice Miller.

Now, let's zoom in a little bit on Lethbridge. Adding back those two rural ridings has zero impact on Lethbridge – Justice Miller said that – but here's the thing. Lethbridge and Red Deer are roughly the same size. They left Red Deer completely alone, but they wiped Lethbridge off the map. The only difference between those two cities that I can think of is that one has a New Democrat member and the other has a separatist. Can the Premier explain why Lethbridge and Red Deer have been treated so differently?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I can only presume that the justice looked at what Judge Miller said, who we've never disparaged. We've always acknowledged that Judge Miller recommended recommendation 5, which we adopted on the basis, actually, of their members continuing to say that there needed to be two additional seats. But Judge Miller, right in his own report, says that he does "not consider all . . . the minority's hybrids to be unreasonable," and he mentions Lethbridge in particular. I think, Mr. Speaker, what should be pointed out is that Lethbridge will, if passed, now have four representatives in this Chamber, and I think they'll get better representation.

Mr. Nenshi: You know, in both rounds of the public hearings of the independent commission the people of Lethbridge were clear. They spoke 5 to 1 against hybridization and hybrid ridings, including, passionately, the Member for Lethbridge-West. Yet this morning the Premier said that member wanted hybrid ridings. Look, I know that the Member for Lethbridge-East seems to be eminently forgettable and ineffective in his role, but surely the Premier knows his name. Why won't the Premier apologize to the Member for Lethbridge-West for misrepresenting . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'll have you apologize and withdraw describing another member of the House in a disparaging way. We don't do that here. You know that. Nobody gets to describe you in a disparaging way. You'll apologize and withdraw.

Mr. Nenshi: I apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seeking clarity from the member just mentioned about what is so different about the communities outside of Lethbridge, the member said that

> just about everything they do is in the city of Lethbridge. Like I said, for those people to vote – let's just even look at that in terms of voting – they have to drive through Lethbridge to get to Coalhurst in order to vote . . . and I think the representation would be a lot easier going that way as well.

That sounds to me like the member opposite was arguing that there should be hybrid ridings because those who are just adjacent and outside Lethbridge do most of their business in Lethbridge. I would say that the committee looked at all of the representations, and that was one.

Mr. Nenshi: It sure sounds like reading comprehension seems to be a problem with this government, who picks and chooses what they want to hear, because, of course, that's not at all what that phrase means.

What's even more offensive about this entire thing is that it's not just diluting the votes of urban voters but this government arrogantly assuming that rural voters will always vote for them and take them for granted. An urban MLA has to advocate for things like public transit, city infrastructure, population growth that a voter hundreds of kilometres away might never see or use. Why does the UCP continue to take rural Alberta for granted?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, in case it was unclear, let me read the next sentence. This is again from the Member for Lethbridge-West. "What I would suggest is that we bring . . . that part of the county of Lethbridge into Lethbridge-West." It's very clear that members opposite were the ones not only asking for additional seats; they were also asking for hybrid ridings in this area, and the commission had to take all of that into consideration. The judge had to look at the different views and be able to make what he felt were going to be the best recommendations, and those will be the recommendations that we discuss tomorrow.

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

Mr. Nenshi: The Premier yet again is attempting to deflect responsibility, and no Albertan believes her when she dances on the head of a pin like that. You'd think she would have learned by now.

Government Services and Artificial Intelligence

Mr. Nenshi: But she's got another interesting tic. When she speaks to audiences that she thinks are friendly, she reveals things she's never said to other Albertans. This weekend, speaking to yet another right-wing figure, she said that she was deeply inspired by Elon Musk and his attempts to rein in government spending in the U.S. Is she

aware that DOGE's ham-fisted, billionaire-driven approach didn't save any money and, in fact, resulted in over 1 million deaths?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I said that we were inspired by AI and how it might be applied to government services. In fact, when the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane was Infrastructure minister, he proposed a $51 million fix to bringing together four different databases for our real estate portfolio. Our Minister of Technology and Innovation said, "You know what? We can do that internally," and as a result we were able to get it done with training of our internal staff in a matter of weeks, and now we have a comprehensive real estate registry. That's the way in which we're using data and technology, and it's going to save taxpayers money.

Mr. Nenshi: Look, DOGE was a bunch of people who didn't know what they were doing attempting to cut government spending. Now, it's exciting to know that this government, after only six and a half years, is the most wasteful government in Alberta's history and is finally looking at getting rid of its own waste, fraud, corruption, and abuse, but we don't need AI to tell us to stop giving money to Sam Mraiche and all his endless nephews. What guarantees are there in place that this AI-driven approach will not lead to further harm for Albertans?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, it only took him 18 months to find out about our Continuous Improvement Cabinet Committee and the work that we're doing through Technology and Innovation. The Minister of Technology and Innovation has been writing a blog post on this, talking about all of the exciting ways in which we're training through our AI Academy. In fact, it's gotten so much prestige that Quebec asked to partner with us so that they could translate our learning into French so that it can be applied to their public service as well. Last time I checked, we had over 4,000 public servants who are trained on this, Mr. Speaker. We're really excited about increasing the capacity of our public service.

2:00

Mr. Nenshi: Yet the minister's newsletter has not led to any actual benefits for Albertans.

You would have thought that this Premier would have learned by now that every single time she follows her MAGA instincts, things go horribly wrong. The former Finance minister tried to warn her about it, and look where he is now. Her anti-immigration pose failed spectacularly. Gerrymandering is going down the same way. What makes her think that following her heroes Elon Musk and Donald Trump is actually going to help Albertans this time? Trust her now.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, my heroes are the independent members of the nonpartisan civil service who've really risen to the challenge that we've given to them, seeking out education on AI learning and how they can apply it to their work. We have had so many successes where they have been able to take what would be 15 months' worth of work and be able to compress it into a matter of days so that we can use that data. They're doing incredible work, which is why we have the public service awards every year honouring the work that they do. That's how we're going to continue using technology for the benefit of Albertans. I'm very proud of them, and that member opposite should be, too.

Electoral Boundaries Committee Report
(continued)

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, Albertans finally got to look at the proposed maps from the UCP's do-it-again-but-in-secret panel, and they saw what's obvious. The maps put forward by this panel that met with no one seem designed solely to tilt the playing field towards the UCP in the next election. To the Premier: since the secret panel exceeded their mandate and blatantly ignored Justice Miller's direction that nothing south of Airdrie be changed, will you agree that these rigged maps are unworthy of this Assembly's consideration?

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

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Once again, for the member's benefit, the panel did exactly what the majority report recommended, and that is to consider a layout on distribution of this province and the electoral distance based on 91 different seats. The reality is that two members from the NDP, two members from the governing party were part of this panel. Decisions were reviewed by the judge, and the judge made a decision. We have that report before the Assembly. It's subject to debate, and we'll look to see where it goes.

Ms Gray: It wasn't a majority decision. The Premier told media, quote, that the intention and what the judge gave his advice on was how to add two rural ridings with the minimal impact on the rest of the majority report. End quote. The judge specifically directed that nothing south of Airdrie should be changed. Instead, the panel split Lethbridge into four. Does the Premier think so little of urban Lethbridge voters and of rural southern Albertans that she would deny both groups the unique representation that they deserve merely to benefit the UCP at election time?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, it was the report of the majority. It was the recommendation of the majority. That's exactly what the report says. That's what the act says as well. The reality is that the panel that was struck looked at the recommendations made in the majority decision of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. The panel was specifically required to look at the recommendations and apply a redistribution of the maps that considered effective representation as its paramount goal. The report has now been tabled. Let's look at it, let's debate it, and let's make a decision as an Assembly.

Ms Gray: They were required to look at the recommendations and then do something completely different, Mr. Speaker? It's ridiculous.

The CEO of Elections Alberta has now told all MLAs that he's concerned about his ability to implement these highly controversial maps. Rather than engage with this thoughtfully, that minister wrote back saying essentially: you will do it anyways. Will the government do the right thing? Join with the opposition, pass the fair and reasonable majority report maps proposed by the original boundaries commission, set a fair playing field, get back to the business Albertans want you focused on, not rigging the next election.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, we have been unequivocally clear. Albertans expect their elections to happen pursuant to the law. There are fixed election dates here in this province, and we expect those elections to be administered on time, freely and fairly. Alberta's fixed election date is established in law. I don't understand why the opposition would take an issue with that, and we've been clear that we have no intentions of changing that or making changes to the process whatsoever. Elections Alberta has demonstrated that it is capable of conducting a massive referendum. They should be able to conduct an election as well.

Education and Childcare Minister

Member Irwin: A year ago this UCP government stripped away teachers' rights, forcing them back to work. And who was at the

helm while his Premier flew off and hid in Saudi Arabia? This education minister. Well, report cards are out from Alberta's teachers, and this minister gets a failing grade. Class sizes aren't smaller. Students are still struggling. It's impossible to find subs. Morale is low, and many teachers are burnt out. So to the Member for Calgary-Bow: was it worth it?

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

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we want to ensure that our students remain in the classroom at all times, and that was the precondition behind Bill 2, to make sure that they return to the classroom and that their learning is not held hostage. But we've made significant steps since that time to improve classroom conditions, including class sizes and complexity. We've provided funding and successfully hired over 2,100 net new teachers, over 1,000 net new EAs. Approximately 81 per cent of our 700 complexity teams have been fully staffed and in place to support kids across the province.

Member Irwin: Given that that's a no and given that a whopping 82 per cent of voters in Calgary-Bow rejected separatism yet their MLA can't bring himself to say the same and given that his constituents also said no to nearly all the other nine questions, including no to xenophobic nonsense like keeping newcomer kids out of school, and given that this minister took an oath to do his best every day to represent the people, will he right now confirm that he supports the way that his constituents voted in the referendum?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, over the past few years we've experienced significant growth in our education system as we've welcomed 90,000 new students over the course of just four short years. That's why we're moving forward aggressively with the schools now program, an $8.6 billion historic investment to build and modernize schools across the province, in addition to the funding that we've put in place to hire, as I've mentioned, over 2,100 net new teachers, 1,000 net new EAs, almost 700 complexity teams, not to mention comprehensive reporting of class size and complexity level data that we're collecting.

Member Irwin: Given that it's clear this education minister has proven he has zero interest in representing his constituents and given that it's clear he also knows that his job is in jeopardy, it's no surprise that his constituency will be Trump-style gerrymandered. That's right. The UCP has redrawn riding maps to benefit that minister, and Calgary-Bow voters just became pawns in the UCP's vote-rigging game, lumping rural voters from far outside Calgary's limits into Calgary-Bow. Why is that education minister spending time picking and choosing new voters instead of just – I don't know – funding education and listening to his constituents?

The Speaker: You'll be shocked to know I haven't memorized the whole book, but I get help. Page 525 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* says that ministers should be referred to by their portfolios. I'm just going to say that I'm sure that was an honest oversight, and we'll just look forward to better in the future.

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to fund our education system. That's why we've provided a record 7 per cent budgetary increase in Budget '26, the highest year-over-year increase in the education portfolio than any other government in our province's history. It's why we've created the schools now program and are moving forward aggressively with many of those investments that I've made.

As it relates to the upcoming election, I know in the last election the NDP put one of their star candidates in the riding of Calgary-Bow that I was happy to send packing, so in 2027 I say to them: bring it on.

2026 Wildfire Season

Mr. Rowswell: Mr. Speaker, every spring Albertans living around our forested communities continue to keep an eye out for smoke and a go bag by the door. This year as we conclude our wildfire season, memories of Jasper, Fort McMurray, and Slave Lake still remain in the minds of constituents across the province. To the Minister of Forestry and Parks: now that the 2026 wildfire season is behind us, could you please share how Alberta fared and what made the difference?

2:10

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. This season was different than the last three seasons, and we're grateful for that. Since January 1 Alberta Wildfire responded to 791 wildfires that burned just under 18,000 hectares. This is a reduction of 30 per cent in fires and over 97 per cent reduction in the total area burned compared to the five-year average. The rain helped, no question, but our crews hit fires hard on initial attack and kept them small before they could threaten communities. This work will not stop, and we are already preparing for next season.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. Given that we can't count on the weather to do the heavy lifting every year and further given that Albertans expect boots on the ground and aircraft overhead to be ready no matter what the forecast says, to the same minister: what did Alberta's government do to strengthen its firefighting capacity heading into this season, and how will those investments pay off in tougher years ahead?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This year we added three night-vision helicopters, bringing our total to seven, so crews can fight fires around the clock. We added two hoist-equipped helicopters to get firefighters in and out of hard-to-reach terrain. On top of that, earlier this year we signed a contract for five new made-in-Alberta water bombers. Budget 2026 put $169 million behind wildfire management as well as contingency funds used during the season. When the tough years come, we'll be ready.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his continued hard work preparing Alberta for wildfire season. Given that the season officially ended on October 31 but wildfire risk simply doesn't disappear and further given that families I represent want to know that the work being done to protect their homes continues throughout the winter, to the same minister: what is the Alberta government doing to reduce wildfire risk around communities and parks before the next season starts?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Wildfire doesn't keep a calendar, so Alberta Wildfire works year-round. Since the start of the community hazardous fuels reduction program more than

6,200 hectares near 24 at-risk communities have been treated to reduce hazardous fuels. Even with that, since April 2025 we've built about 1,000 hectares of fuel breaks to slow fires near developed areas. Alberta Parks treated more than 125 hectares across nine provincial parks, and this season our mutual aid incentive pilot offered municipalities up to $125,000 to call for help sooner. To every firefighter and partner who answered the call this year: our government thanks you, this House thanks you, and Alberta thanks you.

Alberta Participation in Federal Programs

Mr. Haji: On October 19 Albertans voted in a referendum against opting out of federal programs. On October 20 the Premier promised to honour the mandate and listen to the will of the people, but just days later the UCP government announced they are sticking with pulling Alberta out of the Canadian dental care plan. Why is the Premier ignoring the results of her own referendum, and will she commit today to keeping Albertans on the national plan?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of hospitals.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we did say to the federal government is that we want to be treated fairly in Alberta. On the pharmacare plan, in fact, what happened is that they had $1.5 billion allocated. They spent it, gave it away to three provinces and one territory, and wouldn't even discuss it with the rest of the provinces. They're not even talking pharmacare anymore, so we're going to continue to make sure that Albertans have the right to have the same fair treatment as every other province in this country.

Mr. Haji: Given that fairness is not in the terminology of this government and given that Albertans across the province strongly voted against opting out of federal programs and seniors, children, and working families are counting on this coverage, given that nearly half a million Albertans have already used this plan to cover their dental care needs, given that families who finally can afford to see a dentist do not care about jurisdictional squabbles, can the Premier take no as an answer from Albertans who need their federally funded dental care plan?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Hospital and Surgical Services.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the members opposite take yes for an answer? We are in fact working with the federal government. We have made sure that Albertans have access to the Canadian dental plan as presented, but we also are second payer. We have very generous dental plans here in the province. First the Canadian dental plan will kick in, and then we will continue to augment that as needed. We're going to continue to fight for Albertans to make sure that they have equal access to those federal government programs.

Mr. Haji: Given that dentists have said that the lack of details from this government makes an already confusing situation worse for patients and dentists and given that the Premier announced two years ago her plan to opt out of this program, took it to a referendum, lost it, and plans on plowing ahead anyway without any replacement coverage for the federal program, will the Premier honour the results of the referendum and stop wasting time trying to control federally funded programs like the CPP or the Canada dental care plan?

The Speaker: The minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite really are confused because we are in fact making sure that Albertans have access to that Canadian dental program, but they also have access to our very generous dental programs for those that are in lower incomes. We continue to work with the federal government. We have signed a shared priorities agreement, aging with dignity, as well as the rare disease agreements. We continue to ask the federal government to treat Alberta fairly, and we will do that ongoing.

Government Priorities

Ms Hayter: Mr. Speaker, 75 per cent of Albertans voted in support of Alberta remaining in Canada, but when given the chance to stand with 75 per cent of Albertans who denounced separatism, yesterday not a single UCP MLA voted to support national unity. This UCP government continues to tell Albertans one thing and then the House does the opposite. How can Albertans trust that the UCP will focus on Albertans' priorities when they can't even vote for Canada?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the member opposite for the question. The reality is that there was no need for a vote in this Chamber, particularly because we were just given a mandate by Albertans in a historic referendum with historic voter turnout clearly indicating that Albertans want to stay within Canada, which we on this side of the House fully agree with. Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that going forward we must now focus on what's most important, which is carving out space for Alberta to make sure we're getting a fair deal for Alberta in Canada and continuing to lead the country in things like job creation and investment attraction.

The Speaker: I think members know that posting to your socials during question period is not allowed. You've got another 23 hours and 10 minutes of the day to do that, so let's refrain for this 50 minutes.

Ms Hayter: Given that the UCP's divisive referendum was their attempt to distract from their inability to build schools, hospitals, and other basic public services; given that the UCP has raised property taxes by hundreds of dollars for homeowners, making life more unaffordable; and given the wasteful referendum cost untold millions that should have been invested into the priorities of Albertans, not cooked-up backroom policies that this government is doing, when will the government actually deliver on affordability for Calgarians instead of gimmicks and fake announcements?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, the only things cooked-up are the NDP talking points. I can tell you that as a result of the work that we have done under the leadership of our Premier, we continue to lead the country with record investment and job growth. Since becoming elected and becoming Premier, we have gained 305,000 new jobs in this province, private-sector jobs. That's real leadership, and you know what that helps with? Affordability, making sure Albertans can afford groceries, afford their mortgages, and even put a little bit away for maybe a vacation.

Ms Hayter: Given that this government ran on promises to make sure Albertans never pay for health care only to privatize services and send the bill home with the patients and given that this government never told Albertans they would replace the RCMP or threaten Canadian pensions or take away Albertans' rights or hold a costly and pointless referendum to leave Canada and given that the government has no mandate for any of these bad ideas, when will the government listen to Albertans and actually get things done for the people?

The Speaker: The hon. House leader.

2:20

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Promises made and promises kept.

Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we are laser focused on what's most important to Albertans, which are things like affordability, having a meaningful job and employment, making sure that they can pay for their groceries, making sure that gas prices are affordable. That's why we got rid of the gas tax. We're listening to what Albertans are saying because it's important that people around the country know that Alberta will continue to do its job, leading with job growth and investment because that's good for Canada. A strong Canada needs a strong Alberta.

The Speaker: The next set of questions belongs to the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

National Defence Investment in Alberta

Mr. Lunty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal government recently announced billions of dollars in defence investments across Alberta, including major projects at CFB Cold Lake, CFB Edmonton, and CFB Suffield. Given that these projects are expected to create thousands of jobs and increase demand for skilled workers in fields like construction, engineering, aerospace, and technology, to the Minister of Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration: what is the government doing to make sure Albertans have the training and skills needed to take advantage of these opportunities?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of – oh, that's not right. I apologize for that. The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I remember by saying JETI, Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration, and as the minister of such, before I get to the answer, I think it's a great opportunity for me and all members of the House to recognize, as we draw close to Remembrance Day, those who gave the ultimate sacrifice for our freedoms, to remember them and honour them.

Mr. Speaker, the leadership of this government under the Premier has continued to attract investment, particularly from the federal government to the tune of $8 billion, which is going to lead to jobs and growth in our rural and urban communities, which is good for the entire province. We are very proud of this record.

The Speaker: The Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Lunty: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. Given that Alberta businesses will have opportunities to participate in defence-related construction, maintenance, manufacturing, and technology contracts connected to these investments, and given that many small and medium-sized businesses can find federal procurement processes difficult to navigate, to the same minister: what is the government doing to help Alberta businesses compete for and secure their share of these major defence-related economic opportunities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of jobs and economy.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and that is a great question. I can tell you right now that companies around Canada and around Alberta are beating a path to my office door because they want to talk about how they can share their ideas and their technology to be part of the defence industrial strategy. That's why we've seen companies like Canadian UAVs, North Vector Dynamics, UVAD, Airborne Recon Canada, and so many other companies who have so much to offer and who will be part of protecting Canadian sovereignty. Alberta has an important role to play, and our government is going to lead the way under the leadership of our Premier.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Lunty: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the minister for that answer. Given that these investments are expected to bring significant economic activity to communities across Alberta, including Edmonton, Cold Lake, Wainwright, and surrounding regions, and given that many communities continue to face workforce shortages and competition for skilled labour, to the same minister: what is the government doing to attract workers and support long-term economic growth resulting from these investments?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first step is making sure we have the workforce able and trained to meet the demands of tomorrow. That's why we work with my hon. colleague, the Minister of Advanced Education, and the postsecondaries so we're producing those students who have the skills that we need. The second thing is actually taking investment attraction seriously. This is something that we saw completely lacking from the NDP when they were in government. They had no interest in developing the private sector. They were more concerned about building up government jobs and featherbedding to the tune of putting shower heads and light bulbs in people's houses. On this side of the House, the private sector . . .

The Speaker: The next question belongs to the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

School Construction in Calgary-Shaw

Member Campbell: In Calgary-Shaw gymnasiums are converted to classrooms, storage rooms built for supplies now house students, and libraries where students should be discovering new books are now repurposed into year-round overflow classrooms. My constituents were deeply frustrated to see millions and millions being spent on a referendum that no one asked for instead of building schools they need in their neighbourhoods. Why is this UCP minister wasting time on the ridiculous culture war distractions when children in Calgary-Shaw and all over the province still don't have proper schools?

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

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we've completed two school projects directly in the member's riding, and another three are on the way. That's more than I can say for the NDP. When the NDP was in office, the Calgary board of education, in fact, requested a new school for Walden, and the NDP said no. However, when that was requested of our government, we got to work and we approved it immediately because the residents of Calgary-Shaw need schools. That's why we're moving forward in building those schools that the NDP failed to do for those residents.

Member Campbell: Given that this UCP government has given benefits to their friends while making life less affordable for the rest of us, like the radical increase to Calgarian's property taxes last year, and given that my constituents in Calgary-Shaw know that putting up signs that say "future school site" in empty fields is all the UCP has accomplished to build new public schools and given that no student can learn in an empty field, will the Minister of Infrastructure tell students and families in Calgary-Shaw when they'll get the schools they need?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, we've already completed two projects in the member's riding and another three are on the way. Again, I would reinforce that in 2018 the Calgary board of education requested a school in Walden, and the government at that time – let me check my notes – was the NDP, and they said a flat no. However, when that project was requested again in 2025, our government said yes and moved that project forward as quickly as possible. I hope the member opposite will make sure to communicate that information to his residents and constituents.

Member Campbell: Given that this Premier has all the time in the world to text with her separatist friends and millions to waste on a wasteful referendum that didn't even pass and given that this out-of-touch UCP government has the wrong priorities for Albertans and given that the Calgary-Shaw voters just sent a message to this Premier that she seems intent on ignoring, can the Premier provide my constituents with her phone number so they can text to get the schools they need, just like she did with her separatist buddies?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are moving forward with a new K to 9 Catholic school in Walden that'll provide space for 505 students. We're also moving forward with a K to 5 school also in Walden that'll provide capacity for 590 students. In addition, we are also moving forward with a junior high school in Legacy that'll provide capacity to 935 students. As you can see, our record is clear. We're moving forward aggressively on building new schools, unlike the NDP. When they were in office, they told the residents of Calgary-Shaw no to new schools.

The Speaker: Next questions belong to the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Addiction Treatment and Recovery

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The risk of addiction is a condition of human nature. Using corrupt means as a solution to addiction will fail. Harm reduction is a lie. NDP drug sites are the wrong way. Red Deer city council got rid of the NDP drug site after we got rid of the NDP drug sites in Lethbridge and Calgary. To the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction: why are NDP drug sites the wrong way?

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

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We believe that addiction is a treatable illness. Drug consumption sites don't help break that cycle of addiction. This is backed by research from the Canadian Centre of Recovery Excellence, published in the world-leading – that's right; world-leading – journal of *Addiction*. The study found that closing the Red Deer site did not lead to an increase in mortality, emergency department visits, or EMS calls for site users. This real change comes from recovery-oriented care. Treatment helps reclaim their lives, rebuild relationships, and restore wellness. Recovery works.

Mr. Stephan: Most excellent answer.

Given that some homeless shelters see too much chaos and destruction for families and businesses and given that the law must be enforced when there is lawbreaking and given that the right way is for shelters to have expectations of shelter users, empowering them towards more self-reliance as needed to recovery, to the minister: how are we supporting the right culture in shelters, including more accountability to the communities they are in?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the super-duper question. Mr. Speaker, homelessness is a complex issue that requires a strong and co-ordinated response among community partners. Having homelessness and housing supports under MHA allows us to strengthen pathways to recovery. It's about getting people connected with the health supports that they need. We're working with municipalities, law enforcement, and community-based organizations to help those most in need. We will keep our purpose of helping people and delivering outcomes that Albertans deserve.

2:30

Mr. Stephan: Given Alberta has a recovery model for those suffering in addiction and given the right way is to love and support our neighbours to become free from the filthy waters of addiction and given there are miracles as men and women reject addiction and choose recovery, which is the true way, to the minister: what miracles have you seen for men and women choosing recovery?

Mr. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, I've been to the women's prison in Fort Saskatchewan, in our therapeutic living units, and I met two women there. I didn't think they were going to make it, but I encouraged them to stay in the program. This summer at a recovery event they were there volunteering. One lady brought her daughter to meet me, whom she hadn't seen in five years, and her grandson, four years old, whom she'd never met. That was a miracle. Recovery really is possible for everyone. They have their lives and their families back. Recovery works.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Ellerslie.

South Edmonton Hospital Construction Project

Mr. Gurtej Brar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is no secret that this UCP government cancelled the south Edmonton hospital in 2024. When I asked the previous minister for help, they refused. Not a single dollar. People are suffering. They are waiting in the emergency room longer than ever. Does this minister have any sympathy in her heart for Edmonton families?

The Speaker: I'm not sure that sympathy in your heart is a government policy, but go ahead, Minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, when that was announced by the NDP as a last-ditch effort to try and win the election, it was brought forward without a business plan. When we looked into that project, that was going to be 400 beds at a cost of over $4.8 billion. We actually have a plan, in fact, and we have announced that we're going to build two towers at the Misericordia and at the Grey Nuns. That's over 700 beds, and that'll be at a fraction of the cost of the south Edmonton hospital, but we're not going to forget south Edmonton.

Mr. Gurtej Brar: Given that the previous minister refused to commit a single dollar to the south Edmonton hospital and given that a new face now sits in the chair, the new minister has an opportunity to show a different way forward than her predecessor. South Edmonton families have waited long enough. Will this minister finally stand up for them and build the hospital they need as per government policy?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Hospital and Surgical Health Services.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, the member opposite should take yes for an answer. We are in fact going to build an urgent care centre in south Edmonton. That has been announced, and we're going to continue to make sure that the residents of south Edmonton, in fact, do get the care and the services that they require. We have committed to that. We are going to make sure that it is done, and we will continue to ensure that the overall Edmonton community is well served, creating over 700 spaces and more to come.

Mr. Gurtej Brar: Given that this government wasted millions on a divisive referendum while families wait in emergency rooms and given that the Alberta NDP approved and the UCP cancelled the south Edmonton hospital and given that the people are paying the price in longer waits and more suffering, will the minister tell my constituents in Edmonton-Ellerslie that she will do the right thing and restart the south Edmonton hospital construction?

The Speaker: The minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are going to do the right thing. We're going to make sure that the residents of Edmonton and the residents of all Alberta have better access to health care. That includes having more doctors come to the province. In fact, we're leading Canada in our recruitment and retention of doctors 2 to 1. That also includes adding more nurses, double the number of nurses other provinces are able to recruit. We're going to make sure that we don't just build facilities; we're going to have the workforce that actually is able to man them and provide excellent care to Albertans.

Development in Parks and Protected Areas

Dr. Elmeligi: In 2001, with feedback from Albertans, the government expanded Bow Valley wildland provincial park's boundaries to retain large areas of natural landscape with minimal development footprint, providing low-impact recreational opportunities for all. You might think a gondola to a mountaintop conflicts with that, and you'd be right. But why let a pesky management plan or park boundaries get in the way? The government changed the protected area boundary to allow for a gondola proposal at Mount Lady Mac. To the minister: why don't park boundaries mean anything to this government?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of tourism.

Mr. Boitchenko: Well, Mr. Speaker, we all know that we have an ambitious plan of growing our tourism sector to $25 billion by 2035. So when it comes to the Silvertip gondola, designation of Lady Macdonald all-season resort area, it is the first step in the regulatory process and does not approve construction, development, or operation of the gondola. We are going through all the regulatory processes in that project with local community, with the environment, and with the ministry.

Dr. Elmeligi: Well, given the existing legislation prohibited a gondola in the first place; given the government held a public consultation about the boundary change and hundreds of Albertans participated and said no and opposed the gondola in general; and given the government ignored it all, changed the boundaries, and is now pretending to ask for feedback on – you guessed it – a gondola, to the minister: why should Albertans participate in this consultation when it's clear their opinions don't matter and the UCP government will ignore them anyway?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister for Tourism and Sport.

Mr. Boitchenko: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to environmental approvals, all resort proposals must follow Alberta's environmental laws, including assessment, wildlife, water use, and land impact, as specified by the Public Lands Act, Water Act, and Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act. Each proposal is reserved by the all-season resort regulator on a case-by-case basis, including an assessment of water availability, consideration of environmental impact.

Dr. Elmeligi: The minister just doesn't seem to get it because they actually had to change the law to allow this proposal to come forward. The minister also changed park boundaries elsewhere. Given, without any consultation, they changed the boundaries for Marshybank Ecological Reserve; given these changes were to allow for commercial logging in a protected area in part of the ecological reserve and more intensive recreational activity in another part – this ecological reserve protects our water and precious mature pine forests. Once it's gone, we can't get it back. Why doesn't the minister obey his own legislation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Marshybank Ecological Reserve was established in 1987 with an east and west block. Under the Special Places 2000 initiative the Thunder Lake special places nomination identified expanded protection area, which became the Brazeau Canyon wildland park. The expanded protection area was initially part of the Weyerhaeuser Pembina forest management area. In 2001 MER west block was incorporated into Brazeau Canyon wildland provincial park.

Mr. Speaker, as we make these changes that are being considered at this point, it will actually add to the protected area that's within Marshybank.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

AI Data Centre Projects

Mr. Wiebe: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Alberta continues to attract investment and data centre infrastructure, many Albertans are seeking clear and reliable information about the implications these projects may have for electricity demand and water use. While there is significant public discussion on these issues, much of the information available is incomplete or speculation. To the Minister of Technology and Innovation: what are the measures that the government is taking to ensure transparency of energy, water, and infrastructure impacts on Alberta data centres?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Technology and Innovation.

2:40

Mr. Glubish: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has one of the strongest regulatory systems in the world, and we have proven that it is working today. Major projects go through our independent regulators in an open and public process. Our grid operator will only allow connections when reliability and affordability are protected, and it publishes every project seeking a grid connection every month. Furthermore, every water licence and application is a public record and companies must report the water they use and inspectors verify it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for his response. Given that data centres are frequently promoted as an opportunity to support Alberta's robust technology sector and further given that questions remain about the long-term economic

benefits data centres provide, can the same minister inform the House on the real economic benefits of major data centre developments, including jobs, tax revenue, private investment, generated for Alberta?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.
Start over, Minister, and we'll try to hear you first this time.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: Wait a minute. A fresh 35. We're going to try to hear the minister first.
Go ahead.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The benefits are real, and announced and proposed projects represent over a hundred . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Minister, start again.
Heckling is allowed. I've just got to be able to hear the person answering the questions.
Go ahead.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The benefits are real. Announced and proposed projects represent over $100 billion of potential investment, and the largest project to date in the Industrial Heartland is more than $13 billion in private investment, plus a $4.6 billion power plant built right beside it. That means jobs and investment and a stronger supply chain right here in Alberta. This project alone is expected to deliver roughly $250 million a year to Albertans in taxes, royalties, levies, and fees, which will help to fund education, health care, public safety, and services that Albertans rely on. We're not like the No Development Party. We're investing in Alberta's future.

The Speaker: The question belongs to Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that public debate surrounding data centres has become increasingly polarized with competing claims about their effects on the electrical grid and overall value to the province and further given that in the absence of accessible and transparent information, misinformation often fills the gap and undermines public confidence, to the same minister: how does our government ensure that Albertans have access to accurate information on data centre development and its impacts?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Glubish: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Instead of fearmongering, our government is focused on clear, fair, and balanced rules. Our regulators are doing their job, and the recent decision by the regulator in the Olds project proves that this framework works. Bad projects don't proceed. I will also be tabling legislation later this session to make Alberta among the first in North America to address power, water, land use, and community impacts all in one co-ordinated framework. We have created a website where Albertans can find the facts on power, water, and the grid at alberta.ca/datacentres.

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

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice of Government Motion 45, sponsored by myself, which reads as follows:

> (a) be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur in the proposals of the Independent Advisory Panel as set out in its report entitled Report to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, October 2026, Review of the Electoral Boundaries of Alberta and Electoral Division Proposals, which was tabled by the chair of the Select Special Committee on Electoral Boundaries on November 2, 2026, sessional paper 637/2025-26 and which are based on the independent advisory panel's mandate pursuant to Govern Motion 37;
> (b) and be it further resolved that the Legislative Assembly urges the government to introduce a bill to establish new electoral divisions for Alberta in accordance with the proposals of the Independent Advisory Panel.

I also wish to give notice of Government Motion 46, sponsored by myself, which reads as follows.

> Be it resolved that when further consideration of Government Motion 45 is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to the further consideration of the motion, and upon the expiry of the time allotted, every question necessary for the disposal of the motion shall be put forthwith.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education.

Bill 38
Advanced Education Statutes Amendment Act, 2026

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 38, the Advanced Education Statutes Amendment Act, 2026.

This act brings together amendments to the Post-secondary Learning Act and the Professional Governance Act to address tuition maximums, institutional neutrality, freedom of expression, student codes of conduct, and targeted professional governance changes.

With that said, I hereby move first reading of Bill 38, the Advanced Education Statutes Amendment Act, 2026. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 38 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have an essay written by Heather Leigh Cameron called Life on ADAP, and she wanted to share it with the Assembly.

The Speaker: Deputy Government House Leader, do you have a tabling? Sorry. I'm just trying not to cut people off before we move on.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a social media post by Jeffrey Rath including screenshots of text messages between Mr. Rath and the Premier, which the Leader of the Opposition referenced in question period last week.

The Speaker: We're at points of order. Well, there weren't actually any called today, so my sincere gratitude to everybody here.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading

Bill 35
Education and Childcare (Securing Parental Involvement) Statutes Amendment Act, 2026

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

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill 35, the Education and Childcare (Securing Parental Involvement) Statutes Amendment Act, 2026.

The principle behind this bill is very straightforward, which is that parents should have clear, consistent, and timely information when it comes to their children, whether it's understanding how their child is progressing in school, knowing how PD days are being used, understanding where to turn to where a concern has not been resolved, or being informed when a serious incident occurs in child care. Parents should not be left searching for this basic information.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Parents are their children's first and most enduring advocates, but parents can only play that role effectively when they have the information that they need. Across Alberta many schools, school boards, and child care providers are already doing great work to communicate with families, but important practices are not always consistent, and when it comes to something as fundamental as keeping parents informed about their child's education and safety, we believe there should be clear expectations. The purpose of Bill 35 is to establish clear standards in areas where Alberta's parents should reasonably be able to expect consistency, transparency, and accountability. This bill is about strengthening the relationship between parents and the systems entrusted with educating and caring for their children.

I'd like to take the first few moments to talk about the education side of Bill 35. There are four key areas that I would like to discuss: standards for report cards, transparency around PD days, processes for unresolved parent concerns, and the naming and renaming of public school buildings. Now, these may be different issues, but they are grounded in the same principle, that parents and public deserve clarity about decisions and processes affecting their children and their schools. With respect to report cards for most parents a report card is one of the most important tools that they have to understand how their child is doing. It can tell a parent whether their child is succeeding, where they are struggling, and where additional support is needed. That information needs to be meaningful and understandable.

Right now report card practices vary between school boards, and the Education Act does not provide authority for the minister to establish any type of province-wide standards. I believe that parents should be able to expect a consistent standard of information about their child's progress, regardless of which school their child attends. That is why Bill 35, if passed, would enable provincial standards for the issuance of report cards. Importantly, this does not mean imposing a single, province-wide report card template. Rather, school boards will be able to continue to determine the format and delivery of report cards and continue to use their existing systems. The goal is consistency in the standard of information, not uniformity in how that information looks. School boards require flexibility, but parents also deserve confidence that whenever their child attends school, the information they receive is clear and meets provincial standards.

2:50

Secondly, Bill 35 will also provide transparency around non-instructional days, including PD days. These days are important. They provide opportunities for teachers and school staff to undertake professional learning and other work that supports students, but there's currently no requirement for school boards to publicly explain how these days are being used, and these days have different impacts on families. When children are not in class, parents may have to change work schedules, arrange child care, or make other accommodations. If families are being asked to make those adjustments, it's reasonable for them to know how that time is being used to support their child's education.

That is why Bill 35 would require school boards to provide public information about activities conducted during noninstructional days within 60 days. This is not about questioning professional development; it's about making sure that it is transparent. In fact, when teachers and staff are undertaking valuable professional learning that will improve classroom instruction, we want parents to know about that work. Transparency helps parents understand how the education system operates and how the work taking place outside of instructional hours will support students.

Thirdly, we need to make it easier for parents to understand where to turn to when they have a concern. Most issues between a family and a school are resolved at the local level, and that should continue to be in place. Parents should continue to work with their school directly and work with their teachers and principals if they have a concern. Bill 35 does not change that principle, but when a matter remains unresolved, a parent should not be left wondering: what next? A process only works if people can understand and navigate it. Currently processes for receiving and managing these concerns, again, can vary wildly between school boards.

Bill 35 will establish clear and more consistent expectations as to how school boards manage inquiries concerning unresolved parent concerns. Schools and school boards would remain responsible for resolving individual matters, and existing appeal and ministerial review processes would remain in place. What this bill changes is the level of consistency parents can expect. That matters because when parents know where to go, whom to contact, and what the process will look like, concerns can be handled more clearly and more effectively. Parents should not need to understand the inner workings of the education system simply to have a concern heard.

Fourth, Bill 35 will also work to refine the process for naming or renaming public schools. The principle here is responsible decision-making and responsible use of public resources. Under the proposed changes public school boards would seek ministerial permission before beginning the process to name or rename a school building. If permission is granted, boards would continue with their local engagement process. The reason for making this change is practical. There's little value in asking the school board and its community to invest significant time and public resources into a process that may not proceed. An earlier decision provides greater certainty and clarity at the beginning of the process rather than at the end. This allows boards to focus their efforts and resources where they can have the greatest impact.

Now, Madam Speaker, the same principles of ensuring parents have the information that they need applies even more directly when talking about the safety of young children. Parents entrust child care providers with something incredibly important, the safety and well-being of their children. When something serious happens, parents deserve timely information about what has occurred and what is being done in response. They should not have to discover critical safety information after the fact or struggle to determine what additional safeguards have been put in place.

That is why Bill 35 strengthens both transparency for parents and accountability within our child care system. Under the proposed changes critical incidents would be defined in legislation, with clear requirements for licence holders to report them to the department and to parents directly affected. Licence holders would also be required to develop, implement, and post approved safety plans and actively inform families about applicable safety plans, inspection reports, and administrative penalties.

Why is this needed, Madam Speaker? Because although safety planning already occurs, providers are not currently required or mandated to share those plans with parents. If additional measures have been put into place to protect children following a serious incident, parents deserve to know. Bill 35 would make that expectation clear and enforceable, and the bill would provide an important backstop. If a licence holder is unable or unwilling to notify families, Alberta's child care licensing team would have the authority to do so. These requirements would apply to facility-based providers and licensed family day home agencies, with new requirements for family day homes added directly to the Early Learning and Child Care Act. The principle here is simple. When a serious incident affects a child, parents should receive timely information, and there should be clear accountability for providing it.

But transparency after an incident is only one piece of protecting children. Good oversight should also help identify potential concerns before they become larger problems. That is why Bill 35 will broaden the information licensing staff can consider when issuing or renewing a child care licence. This could include an applicant's qualifications and experience, previous enforcement history, relevant financial management issues, and service area demands. The reason for this change is prevention. Licensing decisions should be based on the information necessary to make the best possible assessment of whether an operator can safely and responsibly provide child care. Providing licensing staff with a broader picture allows potential concerns to be considered earlier rather than later.

Bill 35 would also strengthen oversight of early childhood educator certification. Currently early childhood educator certifications do not expire once they're issued. The proposed changes would allow certifications to include expiry dates and renewal requirements, including varying terms. The principle here is, again, quite straightforward, which is that professional standards should not only matter on the day someone receives their certification. There should be tools available to help ensure those standards continue to be met over time.

The bill will clarify administrative processes and permit electronic inspections and monitoring in certain circumstances as well where an immediate in-person visit is not feasible. Virtual inspections would not replace the important in-person work carried out by licensing staff. They would provide an additional tool when circumstances require more flexibility.

Now, Madam Speaker, taken individually, these amendments address different parts of our education and child care system, but together they address a fundamental question. What should Alberta parents reasonably be able to expect from the system responsible for educating and caring for their children? We believe that parents should be able to expect meaningful information about their child's progress. They should be able to understand what is happening in their schools. They should know where to turn to if they have a concern, and when their child's safety is involved, they should receive timely information about what happened and what is being done about it.

Those expectations should not depend entirely on which school authority a child attends or which licensed child care program a family uses. Local flexibility remains important, but flexibility should exist alongside clear expectations for transparency and accountability. Bill 35 establishes that floor while leaving school boards and child care providers the room that they need to operate effectively.

Now, Madam Speaker, some may argue that the government should be focused on other pressures in our education system instead of making these changes, but that presents Albertans with a false choice. Improving classrooms and improving accountability are not competing objectives. Government can invest in teachers. We can invest in educational assistants. We can build new schools and enhance classroom supports while also making sure parents receive clear information and have confidence in the system serving their children. Addressing one challenge does not require us to ignore another, and we should not postpone practical improvements to transparency, safety, and parental involvement simply because other important work is also under way. Parents reasonably expect their government to do both.

Madam Speaker, Bill 35 is ultimately based, again, on a simple principle. When it comes to a child's education, care, and safety, parents should not be on the outside looking in. They should have the information necessary to understand how their child is progressing. They should understand how the education system is serving their child. They should know where to turn to where they have a concern, and when a serious incident happens in a child care centre, they should know what happened and what is being done to keep children safe. Bill 35 will establish clear expectations in each of these areas. It'll preserve appropriate local decision-making while establishing a consistent foundation. Most importantly, it'll recognize something that should guide all of our work, that parents are not observers in their child's education and care; they are partners, and our laws should reflect that.

3:00

The education amendments are anticipated to come into force on proclamation in time for the '27-28 school year, supported by the requisite ministerial orders and implementation information for school boards. The child care amendments are expected to come into force on proclamation and take effect on March 1, 2027, with stakeholder implementation sessions planned for January 2027.

Madam Speaker, these are practical changes based on reasonable expectations, clear information, clear processes, stronger accountability, and parents ultimately better equipped to advocate and support their children.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I encourage all members of the Assembly to support the amendments in Bill 35.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 35, the education and child care statutes amendment act. I would like to begin by acknowledging a few things. Let me speak first to the changes that are set out in Bill 35 with respect to child care facilities and licensed day homes as well. I want to begin by acknowledging that there is reference in this act which I believe was intended to address the very tragic situation that we saw in Alberta and especially for those folks in Calgary over the summer with the loss of Parker Wells, a young boy who left his day home and was later found deceased, which I know seized not just the city of Calgary but all of Alberta as the search for him continued. That was a very tragic situation.

I know that many of us are looking for opportunities to make child care safer for children like Parker but for all children across the province. I do note that in Bill 35 there is, you know, creation of a new definition about a critical incident which includes a child

going missing while attending a child care program, and as a result of that there are notification and reporting requirements that fall from that.

However, we know that that's not the only situation in which children may be unsafe in child care settings. I want to begin by thanking deeply my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-Gold Bar, who brought forward a situation last spring of the situation that is for many parents probably one of their worst nightmares, finding out that at their child care centre one of the child care workers allegedly had sexually abused one of the children at the daycare. It took two months for the other parents in that child care facility to be notified of the fact that their children might have been exposed at some point to a child care worker who these accusations had been levied.

I want to begin by also first saying that we know that the vast majority – vast, vast majority – of child care settings, child care workers do incredible work to support children and early learning, to support families, and we are only trying to set out those measures to protect in those very rare instances where something goes horribly wrong. But it's because of those instances – they can go horribly wrong, and they affect children – that it is important to make sure that our legislation covers all situations possible to make sure parents, to the minister's point, are notified, and all parents want to know that their children are safe.

Unfortunately, in that case of the Willowbrae Academy, which my colleague brought up, the situation there was that the child who had allegedly been abused by this child care worker: their parents were notified, but the other parents were not. That was the situation and concern raised by my colleague and by other members of the opposition, calling for better protections and notification to all parents when their child might have been involved in an incident such as that.

Unfortunately, Bill 35 doesn't go far enough to ensure that all those other parents are also notified. While there is a procedure in place that addresses that there must be notification immediately to the parent of the child who's been affected and there must be notification to the statutory director, meaning the ministry, it does not require similar immediate notification to the other parents in that child care facility. That's the very issue that we were trying to address, that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was trying to address, to say that parents deserve to know, especially when we're talking about very young children.

We're talking about children predominantly under the age of six who may not have the words or the ability to communicate to their own parents. When you find out that something like that has taken place in your child care centre or in your day home, I think all parents deserve to know because they may be the person to whom they can actually speak to their child and find out what's happened. But if they don't know that that's taken place, most parents would not know even how to engage in a conversation to find that out. While Bill 35 does provide new measures, it does not address the concern that was raised by my colleague about making sure that all parents get notification when an incident like that has taken place in their child care centre.

I also want to highlight that I do believe that all children deserve to be safe no matter what their child care setting and that all parents deserve to be notified. Unfortunately, the amendments that are proposed in Bill 35 only apply to licensed facility-based child care, which is daycares as we commonly know them, as well as licensed family day homes. It does not apply to unlicensed private day homes. There are minimal provisions in the Early Learning and Child Care Act which would actually protect the families and children and parents of – and we know that many Alberta parents do choose private, unlicensed day homes to place their children. I would argue, Madam Speaker, that those children have every right to be as safe as children in other child care centres, and those parents also should be required to be notified if something takes place. I challenge the Minister of Education and Childcare to consider expanding protections to all parents in a child care setting when an incident such as this has taken place but also to make sure that those protections apply to children in unlicensed, private day homes.

When it comes to the other elements of this education and child care amendment act, the pieces around K to 12 education, I want to take a moment to, you know, reference that what a government decides to put forward as legislation is a signal of its priorities. It was merely a year ago that we all were in this place and thousands of Albertans were standing outside – teachers, parents, family members, students – calling on this government to provide better conditions in classrooms. When we return to the Legislature after a long break, as we just have, it is instructive to this Chamber and to Albertans to see the priorities that this government has set out by its legislative agenda. We know for the last two years that the government has been consumed by a crisis that they created when it came to separatism and having a referendum on questions that nobody was interested in. And now we see that they've come back to the Legislature, and when it comes to education, their priorities are about standardizing report cards, reporting on what happens at PD days, and the process for renaming schools.

I will say, Madam Speaker, that I am a parent. I certainly have received report cards. When my children were first enrolled in school and I got the first set of report cards, I wasn't entirely sure exactly what the grading meant, and a conversation with the teacher and with the principal of my kids' school helped me understand. Certainly, if I had more frustrations, I know I could take that question to the school board. Instead, what we see here is that the provincial government in its effort to standardize report cards is really saying that they believe that they want to reach in and decide for every local school board, every local school, every classroom what those report cards should report back on.

Now, I say "every," except it's interesting that these provisions around standardized report cards do not apply to charter schools and private schools. Apparently, in those situations the minister does not believe that those parents deserve to have more information on their report cards; only parents in public, separate, and francophone schools.

The other piece of this, of course, is reporting on PD days. Now, the members on the other side should know if they don't that the decision about how many days of professional development each school board is entitled to or the teachers in those school boards are entitled to are set by collective bargaining. That is established as part of bargaining, and that's where it comes through, the instructional versus noninstructional days, and that is where those determinations are made. I certainly do not believe that it would be appropriate in any way to impugn the number of professional development days that teachers are entitled to as all professionals should be entitled to professional development. Obviously, the government negotiates with the Alberta Teachers' Association to set that number.

Now, what's interesting about better understanding of what happens on PD days – sure, I am a parent who also has to sometimes negotiate the fact that suddenly and sometimes surprisingly, because I'm not always as great at checking SchoolZone as I should be, I find out that there's a PD day and have to manage and figure out where my kids are going to go or what's happening with them. I've certainly been in that situation. I'm even married to a teacher, and I still get surprised by it. So I understand that. Many parents might be curious about what happens during a PD day. I certainly encourage at every step possible better communication between schools and school boards and parents. What I don't understand is why the government needs to step in and decide that for school boards.

3:10

I'm completely puzzled by why a supposedly conservative government believes that they need to put their hands in every single thing they can. They meddle in every minute detail of every municipality, of every school board, of every professional regulatory body. This is the biggest government not only in terms of numbers of their cabinet but also in terms of reach and overreach of any government this province has ever seen, yet they still deem themselves valid in calling themselves conservative. It's baffling.

One of the things that we know very much is that if there are some challenges – yes, there is a variety in how school boards practise across the province. It's because we have 62 elected school boards. Elected school boards. The reason we have 62 school boards is because we recognize that what happens in one community is not going to make sense in another community. What happens in inner-city Edmonton is not going to be the same out in Peace River. It's going to be different, and the school boards and the trustees are elected to reflect those local needs. So when it comes to communication, yes, perhaps some school boards can do better communication and can be encouraged to do that. Certainly, that's a fair conversation for parents and teachers and students to have with their locally elected school boards.

When I see the government stepping in in this way down to standardizing what report cards are going to look like in every school across this province, when I see them ordering certain publication of what happens on PD days, I don't see a government that trusts the local school boards. What I see is a government who is actually overriding and feeling they know better than locally elected school boards. That's where I think this path of this government really is. The respect for the locally elected school board just isn't there.

Another thing I know as a parent is that if one of your kids isn't meeting standards or even in a workplace if some people are having challenges meeting a standard, that does not mean that you intrude upon everybody and set new standards and enforce that on everybody. You work with those who need it. So if there are concerns – and we certainly did not hear from the minister any clear evidence of consultation or concerns that were raised about particular school boards or if it was province-wide. We don't know how many people were complaining about transparency around PD days to the minister. We don't know how many parents were complaining about report cards to the minister. But, certainly, why not work with those school boards or those jurisdictions that perhaps can do a better job rather than the big arm and the big eye of the UCP government intruding over and saying, "We're going to set the standards for everybody"? That runs counter to local governments.

And, yes, I will say, by the way, that this idea that parents don't know what to do if they can't get an issue resolved at the school level has not been my experience either as a parent or as somebody who has worked for various school boards across this province for many years, including at the department level but directly for school boards, where it is very clear that they do know that they can go to the school board to ask questions that are not resolved at the school level. In fact, that's my husband's entire job with Edmonton public schools. He takes questions from parents who found that their questions couldn't be resolved at the school level. Every school board has some degree of that.

This is about government being able to have a big eye on all the complaints that might be going to school boards. They want to be able to monitor that so they can use that as ammunition in their ongoing war against teachers, school boards, whatever it is. And, yes, the minister did say that he expects that we will say as the opposition that they can be worried about this and also be worried about things like building schools and addressing classroom complexity and ensuring teachers feel valued and respected so we have the educators we need, and he says that it's very possible for a government to do that as well as focus, apparently, on flags in schools and banning books from libraries and standardizing report cards.

The problem is, Madam Speaker, that this government has not proven itself capable of doing both of those things. The only thing they are capable of doing is interfering in a minute level for culture war politics to make people angry, to pick fights. That's their priority, and that's what they're focused on. It is true that this government has not focused until the last 18 months – all of a sudden they woke up. After almost eight years in government they suddenly woke up to the fact that we have a school shortage in this province. I've been in MLA for my community for almost eight years as well, and I can tell you we have been raising the alarms of crowded schools.

And, yes, let me just say that in the four years that the Alberta NDP was government, we built or modernized 244 school projects. Compare that to almost eight years of a UCP government, and they've done fewer than 100. In Calgary-Shaw, Madam Speaker, in the riding where my new colleague was just elected, there are only two schools identified on the school capital projects list for Calgary board of education in Calgary-Shaw, and none of them are in the construction phase.

The minister wants to talk about focus. Where was that focus on education for six years? Suddenly they've woken up. And, by the way, as they've woken up to building new schools, they decided to blame newcomers to this province for overcrowded schools. But you know who rejected that, Madam Speaker? The voters in Calgary and Edmonton who know full well who's responsible for their overcrowded schools and their lack of hospitals. They know that it's not the newcomers. They know that it's a government that has ignored that part of their responsibility of delivering public education for almost eight years.

You know, I'd be more than happy to talk about report cards and PD days and reporting about school unresolved issues if this government had any clue as to how to address the real pressing issues facing public education in this province, if they had a real plan to actually put shovels in the ground in school sites across this province to get the schools built, if they didn't just wake up and start to care about class complexity despite the fact that thousands of Albertans and their teachers and their parents have been talking about it for years.

Madam Speaker, given the lack of focus of this government on the real priorities of education I don't think that they're fit to continue on to serve as the government of this province, but I sure know that the Alberta NDP is ready.

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

Member Batten: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to join debate on Bill 35, Education and Childcare (Securing Parental Involvement) Statutes Amendment Act, 2026. I do find the title kind of amusing, honestly, because I'm not sure that it actually does that. Looking at the bill and from what the minister had shared, this was in response to incidences that had happened that put children's lives at jeopardy or their safety at jeopardy. I think back. In September 2023 we had the E coli outbreak. We had the Willowbrae abuse, which would have, I guess, happened a year ago, but the government is bringing forward legislation now potentially to address that, and then, as mentioned, Parker Wells. So there are a lot of reasons why this minister should be bringing forward changes so that we can protect Albertan kids.

My concern is that this doesn't do that at all. The entire bill is reactive. It is assuming that children will be harmed and then the government will do something about it. It does nothing to stop the harm in the first place. I understand that, you know, based on the title, it's securing parental involvement, but I suspect that if you asked any parent whether they wanted the government to focus time on keeping their kids safe or informing them when their kids weren't safe, I'm pretty sure it would be the former.

Looking at this bill, we do have some definition updates, and that's fantastic. Clarifying legislation is important. Absolutely. Licensing requirements being, you know, a little bit more clear is fantastic. But where things kind of go sideways for me is when we're looking at, well, the reporting. Based on this legislation, if something happens in a facility taking care of children, a critical incident or an incident – and the difference being a critical incident involves the child directly, and an incident just means they were in the proximity or possibly affected by it. I make that distinction because that is a distinction that's been made in this legislation, which I think is important.

However, the response required is lacking. If an operator is made aware of a critical incident, they are to immediately notify the government or the director. Now, Madam Speaker, when we're talking about a serious issue like this and saying "immediately" or "as reasonably possible," which is how it's described for an incident that is not critical, that doesn't actually provide very clear direction. I understand that it clarifies the previous legislation that simply said, "Duty to report incidents and critical incidents" without any kind of timeline on it, but I would argue this is not a timeline. This is no further clearer on what operators are supposed to do.

3:20

Further, and this was brought up by the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, the notification is only for the parents of the children directly involved. That was a main part of what the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was bringing forward over and over again, appropriately, advocating for his constituents.

That was one of the major concerns brought forward, that the other parents were never notified or they were notified super late. You know, this doesn't fix that, Madam Speaker. Further, what if your kid isn't there that day? Are they considered part of this, or would you not hear if your kid was sick that day? Like, when you clarify legislation, these are the things that need to be considered. It is interpreted by folks who are trying really hard to do the best they can.

I do want to both commend the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for his incredibly strong advocacy for his constituent and for continuing to battle. I say "battle" specifically because the government was very emotionally disregulated during those times, so I commend him for continuing to push forward with something as incredibly important as this.

All child care providers and early childhood educators: I know that they are some of the most amazing people. They would agree with me, I would say, that the safety of the children in their care is incredibly important, so they would want better legislation in order to be able to do that.

How we create better legislation is that we follow the recommendations that we've been provided in 2023 when we had the E coli outbreak. Kids are still sick. There are still long-term effects from this, and we are seeing next to nothing implemented of those recommendations.

Just to refresh everyone's memory on this, the response from the government was to put together a panel to then take a look at the situation and come up with recommendations that they were then to act on. They have not acted on those recommendations. If the minister is claiming that this is all about children's safety, well, why are we not implementing things that we know we should? We are literally amending the Early Learning and Child Care Act, which is where the E coli panel recommendations would fit, but it's not here.

I appreciate that there are a lot of things going on. As the minister had pointed out or claims that they can do two things at once, all we're asking for is legislation that actually protects children. That's what we're looking for. Nothing is perfect. We need to amend things, but we also need to take expert advice, expert recommendations, let alone expert recommendations from a panel that the government put together. Taxpayers paid for this panel to come up with solutions, and the government has decided they don't want to use them, apparently.

Now, something else inside this bill that I find quite troublesome is under duty to post. Well, you might recall that that was one of the recommendations coming out of the E coli panel. When I say the E coli panel, I mean the Food Safety and Licensed Facility-based Child Care Review Panel. Long name. One of the recommendations, A.1.4, is that there would be a grading system for transparency, literally just a letter on the door that tells parents how this centre ranks, not listing or potentially listing all their possible infractions or communications with the statutory director because that's not helpful. Those are posted inside, which is important. That's the transparency piece. But it's provided only physically inside. It's not posted anywhere else. It's not clear and easy for parents or guardians to read and understand. The child they are leaving there: are they safe or are they not? A letter grade, like they do in restaurants, would provide that clarity. That was actually brought forward as a recommendation. Have we done it? No.

The E coli panel also looked at, recommendation A.2, additional training. Of course, the idea there: things went sideways, bad things happened, children got hurt. We need to review what happened, figure out lessons learned, and then move forward with it. We don't just ignore what happened. Recommendation A.2, again, additional training: there's nothing in here. There's nothing in here that's going to support child care workers or child care centres when, God forbid, a child goes missing. Madam Speaker, if a child goes missing, under this legislation it's considered a critical incident. The centre, the operator that was responsible for that child has to report to the government. The government then does what? Yeah. The government may – may – suggest a safety plan. You're telling me that this government is okay with not taking action should a critical incident arise. Otherwise, it would say "must," that there must be lessons learned, that there must be a safety plan there. But it says "may," so the discretion of whoever, the influence of whoever.

Other recommendations that were missed: B.2, formalize expectations for inspectors. We've got some consequences noted in this bill for bad actors or for folks involved where children were unsafe. This government has decreased the number of inspectors, full stop, which has continued to happen since the E coli outbreak. Let's just paint that out here. Let's just be very blunt about it. We had a massive illness outbreak that harmed children, and the reaction from this government wasn't to learn from those lessons; in fact, it was to double down that we don't need inspections. When I see a bill coming forward that very much would require additional inspections but we're not hearing anything about how that's going to be resourced, it makes me a little concerned, Madam Speaker, that we are not serving Albertans here. Correction: the government is not serving Albertans here.

There's a whole other list. I mean, my goodness, they came up with such great recommendations. How difficult is it for Albertan parents to know that there are things happening in this province that this government knows they could prevent possibly or at least put their best effort forward so that Albertan children aren't harmed? Alberta parents knowing that, understanding that this government has chosen – instead of being proactive, instead of talking about

preventing the situation, they decided to update this bill assuming that children are being harmed. That is a terrible space to sit. Albertans deserve so much better than that.

September 2023 was the E coli outbreak. The panel came out in June 2024. It is now November of 2026, and again, this is the answer to all of those things. Bad things are happening to kids. We know bad things are happening to kids, and the government decides we should just talk about what happens to the offenders, not what we can do to prevent it. That is bad governance, Madam Speaker.

With that, I will let my colleagues speak.

3:30

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

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and say a few words on Bill 35, the Education and Childcare (Securing Parental Involvement) Statutes Amendment Act, 2026, and I'm going to focus my comments only on the provisions under the Early Learning and Child Care Act.

Sometime between 2023 and the summer of 2025 children at Willowbrae Academy who were left in the care of Dilpreet Singh Chawla were asked by him if they wanted to play a game. If they said yes, Dilpreet Singh Chawla lured them to a shed in the yard of Willowbrae Academy, knowing that that shed was not being monitored by video cameras. And in that shed he sexually abused at least two children. It wasn't until July 16, 2025, probably two years after the first incident occurred and a month after the initial investigation was launched by the Edmonton Police Service, that Edmonton police issued a warrant for his arrest. By the time that warrant was issued, Dilpreet Singh Chawla had fled the country and was beyond the reach of law enforcement.

On August 22, 2025, Willowbrae Academy finally notified the parents of a serious incident, providing them no further details. Parents were justifiably upset and had a number of questions about what that meant. But it was only at a town hall that parents organized with the operators of Willowbrae Academy on September 8 where they found out from the mother of the complainant that her child had been sexually abused by Dilpreet Singh Chawla. And upon further investigation, parents were horrified to find out that the notification procedures that Willowbrae Academy had followed were fully permissible by law.

They justifiably were upset that this government's regulations failed to protect the children of Willowbrae Academy, so in November 2025 I invited some of those parents at Willowbrae Academy to attend question period. I asked the Minister of Education and Childcare whether or not he would meet with those parents to discuss their concerns. Much to my shock and much to the horror and dismay of the parents that I invited to attend question period that day, the minister refused to meet with them. Not being satisfied, I continued to press the minister on why he continued to allow a regulatory regime to continue that failed to protect children from sexual predators like Dilpreet Singh Chawla. And when I asked the minister to defend his regulatory regime that allows that kind of behaviour to continue in our daycares, the Government House Leader stood up and, instead of apologizing to the parents of Willowbrae Academy or promising to do anything to protect the children of our province, accused me of impropriety in this Legislature and then refused to answer my questions for the rest of that sitting of the Legislature.

In March 2026 my colleagues the Member for Calgary-Acadia and the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods and I had a press conference where we set out our expectations for government reform of the Early Learning and Child Care Act that would better inform parents so that they could protect their children in cases of sexual abuse or other critical incidents at daycares. We set out two expectations: first, that the government lead the notification of parents whose children are in child care where these kinds of incidents occur, and, two, that the government establish a public portal where parents can find out the incident and investigation history of every licensed child care provider in the province.

These are simple, common-sense reforms that should have been easily implementable by any government that was genuinely concerned about protecting children in daycares, but instead we get Bill 35, which fails on both counts. I'm afraid, Madam Speaker, that because it fails to adopt the common-sense reforms that our caucus proposed in March 2026, it will not provide parents with the information that they need to protect their children in daycares where these critical incidents occur.

One of the ways that this fails is that in the case of a serious incident a facility provider is required to provide notice only to – sorry. Right. I need to find the section of the bill here. "A holder of a facility-based licence must report [this] to the statutory director, in the manner required by the statutory director, any incident" or critical incident, and "a holder of a facility-based licence must inform parents or guardians of children directly affected by an incident or critical incident as soon as reasonably possible after the licence holder becomes aware of the incident or critical incident."

Now, this fails to meet our recommendations for common-sense regulatory reform on two counts. One, it still places the responsibility of notifying parents of critical incidents on the facility and not on government. Madam Speaker, facilities cannot be trusted to report these types of incidents to parents because they have a vested interest in covering up this information. It boggles my mind that we recognize that restaurants can't be trusted to report to the public when they violate public health regulations and are required – Alberta Health Services notifies the public when restaurants violate public health regulations, but in the case of a child death or child sexual abuse in a daycare we're going to allow the facility to notify parents? That doesn't make sense, and it fails to protect children and parents from knowing when these types of incidents occur, so this section of the bill should be changed to require the government to provide notice to parents and not place that responsibility on facility operators.

Secondly, in that same clause it says that facility-based licensed providers must only provide notice to directly affected parents or guardians of children without defining clearly who is considered to be directly affected. Madam Speaker, the parents at Willowbrae Academy all wanted to know what went on at Willowbrae Academy. Under this legislation it is not clear to me or to the parents of Willowbrae Academy whether or not they would have been notified of the sexual abuse that had gone on in Willowbrae Academy if this legislation had been in place at the time. This section needs to be amended so that it's clear that all parents at these facilities have the right to know about these incidents as soon as they occur.

3:40

My second concern is that when a statutory director is empowered – although a statutory director is empowered to notify parents, it says that the statutory director may notify parents if the statutory director considers it necessary in cases where the facility-based licence has failed, refused, or is unable to provide information. It provides no guidelines or policies regarding the statutory director's requirements to do so. In fact, in my reading of the legislation it's left entirely up to the discretion of the statutory director. That's not good enough to protect the parents of children in daycare. When a statutory director knows, that person should be required to notify parents of what went on at daycares immediately.

The third thing that I have a concern about is the development of safety plans. Now, the minister talked about facilities being required to develop safety plans after these incidents are reported to them, but

that's not actually what the legislation says. Section 8.1(1) of the legislation says, "The statutory director may require the holder of a facility-based licence to develop, in accordance with the regulations, if any, a safety plan." Again, we have no guardrails, no guidelines, no policies directing the statutory director to mandate safety plans to be put in place, and it's entirely left to the discretion of the statutory director as to when a facility will be required to put a safety plan in place.

Madam Speaker, these issues are too important to be left to the discretion of the statutory director. This Legislature must set out clear expectations for the statutory director to mandate safety plans be put in place, and this part of the legislation should be changed, setting out those expectations so that all parents know exactly what will trigger the development of a safety plan and not be left guessing as to what is in the statutory director's mind on any given day when they have the ability to request a safety plan.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, I'm concerned that we still don't have an adequate requirement to provide the details around the incident. All the legislation requires is for a facility operator to report to the statutory director a critical incident. It doesn't mandate whether or not the details of the critical incident are reported to the statutory director or to the parents.

I think it's very important that parents who are notified of a critical incident know whether or not that critical incident was the death of a child while attending a child care program, a child going missing while attending a child care program, the physical, sexual, or emotional abuse or neglect of a child while attending a child care program, or an injury to a child while attending a child care program. The details of these critical incidents matter to how parents care for their children when they've witnessed or been subjected to these kinds of incidents. And unless it's explicitly spelled out in the legislation that the facility operator or the statutory director report the details of the incident to the parents, the parents are still left guessing what happened to their children at daycare when this critical incident occurred. That's not good enough.

Imagine being a parent of a child at a child care facility, knowing that a critical incident occurred but not having any idea whether it was the death of a child in child care, whether your kid was physically or sexually abused, whether someone was injured or went missing. Imagine the fear and the anxiety and the distress that those parents would feel not knowing what kind of critical incident occurred. This legislation needs to be amended so that the details of every critical incident are properly reported to parents.

One final note, Madam Speaker, is that it is imperative that facility operators and the statutory director both understand when they have to report these critical incidents to police. That piece is not in this legislation. It cannot be left to the discretion of either the operator or the statutory director as to when these incidents are reported to the police. This legislation must be amended so that it's clear that when these critical incidents occur, not only must the director be notified and parents be notified but the police need to be called in so that they can conduct a criminal investigation.

Madam Speaker, when . . . [Mr. Schmidt's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

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

Ms Wright: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm going to begin by thanking my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar for his incredibly moving and powerful and, I think, important words. I hope that all of us will not only take heart in terms of what he said, but I do hope that the members across the aisle will take the advice in the spirit in which it was given today. Thank you.

To begin with, Madam Speaker, the issues in this bill certainly attempt to address some extraordinarily serious issues that from time to time, unfortunately, our children face in daycare, in family day homes. Certainly, the implications and ramifications of what can transpire in creating a situation that is not only dangerous but traumatic for the youngest of our citizens here in Alberta are incredibly far reaching. When incidents such as those that have been described today do occur, it isn't just about that one incident. It isn't just about that moment, of course. It's about the whole of the person's life, and it's also about what the other people around that incident do not only in the moment but what it was they did before that moment.

Like my colleagues, I find Bill 35 extraordinarily lacking in terms of the specificity that's needed to not just assist those folks in the daycare and day home centre but also to direct those folks in the day home and daycare centre to do the very best possible job that they can do on behalf of the children that we all entrust them with. This bill is nowhere near sufficient to provide the protections that the minister has promised it offers. One of the reasons, and we've certainly heard it, is because sprinkled throughout the bill we find the words "may" and "might." "May" and "might," Madam Speaker, are not exactly "must" and "required to do so."

I speak here from a variety of perspectives, a perspective of a mom whose kids were, in fact, in daycare, a perspective of a family day home operator who in three different centres across Canada, three different provinces, owned and operated my own family day home, twice with the assistance of a licensed family day home provider and once just simply on my own because licensing for day home operators was unavailable at that point. I can certainly tell you that in terms of what this bill gives us, I myself as that family day home operator really would have appreciated some of the clarity that, in particular, my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar has just asked for.

I myself as a family day home operator had to deal with a couple of incidents that ended up in my family day home not because they happened in my day home but because they happened outside my day home and then were unfortunately brought into my family day home. Thankfully, because of the operator that I was employed by, I received a great deal of assistance. Not only that; the other families within my care also received notifications such as we're talking about today.

Had this bill been around at the time – because this happened in Edmonton a very long time ago. Had this bill happened and the requirements in this bill be things that the family day home operators need to follow, that family day home operator nor myself would have had to have informed the other families in my care. We wouldn't have had to do it because they weren't directly affected by those particular incidents.

Yet particularly for a family day home, Madam Speaker, it's a really unique place to be in. Most day homes don't have more than four to six kids in them. These are kids that know each other well. These are our moms and dads and aunties and uncles that care for these kids. How is it possible that the other families whose kids I was responsible for could possibly have not been aware of these things that had occurred? Despite the fact that they might have occurred outside, as I said, they absolutely had an effect on what happened inside because, quite frankly, it led to a rather traumatic event for all of us. We weren't expecting it, and it happened. Without the assistance, as I say, of the day home agency I was employed by, it would have turned out much, much differently for all of us. Much, much differently.

3:50

My colleagues and I, Madam Speaker, are asking that this particular section of this legislation be provided to parents to truly give them a sense that the government really does have their back, but there are simply too many gaps here.

Like my colleagues before me, I can talk about just the issue of inspections. In my job as shadow minister of labour I often talk about the lack of inspections having to do with workplaces, the fact that most inspections in workplaces are reactive rather than proactive, and there's no difference here at all. We're talking about reactive rather than proactive inspections. This doesn't help anybody at all, Madam Speaker. It doesn't help in terms of adequacy of staff training. It doesn't help in terms of the inspectors actually knowing what's going on, and while I certainly appreciate, I suppose, that the Internet has given us many lovely things, I would suggest, and this, again, comes from the perspective of having been a person who had her own family day home, that inspections actually do need to happen in person. You are dealing with, in many respects, the most vulnerable of our young people. You're in someone else's home. You're in someone else's place of business, in a daycare.

We need to ensure, then, Madam Speaker, that we have not only enough inspectors out there – as my colleague from Calgary-Acadia noted, we know we do not have enough inspectors out there – but not only that; we need to ensure that they are given all the resources at their disposal to ensure that these inspections happen on a regular basis and in person. We should do that. This legislation doesn't do that.

Quite frankly, the idea that we can put up a safety notice – I was thinking again about the perspective of being a family day home owner and operator. A safety plan could be put up in, you know, the day home office but not in my home. It doesn't make any sort of sense at all to me. Why would the parents whose kids I'm taking care of not know about whatever the safety plan is that my day home organization has asked me to adhere to? Why does this bill not include a provision for ensuring staff training in terms of those safety provisions? It doesn't.

Not only are there gaps in terms of just simply notifications in terms of that very first step, that safety step; there are massive gaps in terms of who actually sees that safety plan. More to the point, the people who are caring for our children might not know anything about it if it becomes simply a picture on a wall, Madam Speaker. You walk past it every single day, but you actually don't know what it's about. Again, I think about job sites and the fact that occupational health and safety demands that people do courses on a regular basis so that these sorts of things, the safety of workers and the safety of job sites, are things that happen all the time and that are present in everyone's mind every single moment of every single day that they are on that job site. We should be providing our daycare operators, our family day homes with similar tools, but we are not.

My colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar talked about one of the recommendations that he and the Member for Calgary-Acadia talked about, that idea of folks being able to go onto the government website and be able to see what's happened. They can look up their family daycare, and they can look up and see what inspections they've had, if there have been any licence amendments, modifications, if it's ever been taken away from them, if there have been any fines.

Again, I bring back what happens in business and on job sites. People can do that on that end. Why, then, not for our children? If we're willing to do this for the adults in Alberta, I do not understand why we're not willing to do it for the children in our care, Madam Speaker. That overarching issue is that sort of – the gap is that it does a little bit, but it doesn't do enough. It's like we're just doing this kind of surface play. We're not actually getting into the nitty-gritty of what actually will make a difference in young children's lives. As I said, these are the most vulnerable amongst us.

I still have grandchildren, Madam Speaker, who are going to daycare and who are utilizing family day homes. I would like to know that they are safe, and I would like to know that the people who are caring for them have been provided with all the correct resources to be able to do that and, more to the point, that the other parents and grandparents who are dropping off those kids understand all those processes that are available to them. This bill does not do that.

Now, of course, in addition to all of that, what this bill doesn't do is that it doesn't actually address the issues that many folks, parents, and teachers and, in fact, many students have asked that we address, Madam Speaker. In terms of our K to 12 educational system, for instance, it doesn't address some affordability issues. It doesn't talk at all about the cost of transportation. It doesn't talk at all about the issues around school fees and how difficult many, many parents are finding it to meet those obligations as more and more of those fees get thrust further and further down and they land in the pocketbooks of our parents.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Certainly, this bill does not actually address those real pressing, important issues having to do with complexity in our classrooms. This bill doesn't make, for instance, classroom complexity teams a permanent thing. It doesn't fund them permanently, Mr. Speaker. I recall in estimates just a few months ago asking the minister if these teams would be permanent and, you know, sort of have their own line item. No. Right now they are temporary. This has sort of a knock-on effect in terms of the hiring that school boards are able to do. In some instances, certainly not all but in some, the issue of classroom complexity teams lands on employees who are very, very new. They are given temporary contracts rather than permanent contracts because the class complexity team itself is a temporarily contracted team. That school doesn't know from one year to the next if they are going to retain that team or another similar team.

I remember that years and years ago, and I know that I've talked in this House about this, we had a thing called regional collaborative service delivery. In almost all of the schools in which I taught, in kindergarten classes when there were educational assistants assigned to those classes, Mr. Speaker, those classes had people that came from the Alberta Health Services end of things. These were the folks like speech-language pathologists, speech-language pathology assistants who would come in and do much of that therapeutic work. We also had educational assistants who came from that program, regional collaborative service delivery. But this bill doesn't talk about that because it doesn't make the funding for classroom complexity teams permanent, which, of course, means that our school boards don't have that sense of permanence. They don't have that sense of stability. Neither do the people who are doing this work right now, nor do the children that they are working on behalf of.

More to the point, this bill doesn't provide anything extra to ensure that we have extra paraprofessionals, and I'm speaking primarily of speech-language pathologists here. We have a shortage. About 21 per cent of speech-language pathologists who are currently registered in Alberta work in Alberta schools. That doesn't quite frankly work out to very many per child or per school division, Mr. Speaker. It works out to something like 340 SLPs stretched across the province, and that includes those SLPs who are working with those kids who are the most complex as well as those SLPs who are in charge of many, many schools. We can't answer the questions about complexity unless we're willing to talk about the fact that those other professionals who also support classroom complexity are lacking.

4:00

Again, this bill doesn't provide the answers that our children should be getting, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker. It doesn't answer the very real questions about classroom complexity and whether or not these teams will be able to be funded on a more permanent basis. It also doesn't answer, quite frankly, just the very basic hiring of educational assistants as well as teachers.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

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

Bill 33
Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2026 (No. 2)

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

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to rise in this House and speak to Bill 33, Justice Statutes Amendment Act (No. 2). This summer, like many of my colleagues, I spent a considerable amount of time on doorsteps, at town halls, at various events. Every time I spoke to my constituents, every time I spoke to Albertans, even though conversations were supposed to happen around the referendum, none of them were interested in that.

Rather, they would bring up their concerns with respect to cost of living, with respect to utilities, insurance, grocery prices, with respect to access to health care, wait times in our emergencies, access to school. Still in the northeast quadrant of the city of Calgary parents are being forced to send their kids to schools in different quadrants, which oftentimes takes 45 minutes to an hour one way and certainly impacts their learning outcomes. But here we are. Despite all that – and I'm pretty sure that government members also heard these concerns – their first order of business this sitting is removing DEI hiring practices and training for employees. That shows what the government is prioritizing.

I think what I would say is that even government officials have confirmed that within the GOA there are no DEI hiring practices, or there is no such policy or criteria, but this government's overreach knows no bounds. They think they know better, and they do not respect or regard anyone's autonomy, anyone's ability to make decisions, be that a nonprofit, be that arm's-length organizations such as the Alberta Law Foundation.

They're expanding that list of organizations that would be covered by this restriction. For instance, they are also including those entities that are getting government funding. For instance, an organization in northeast Calgary may be getting government funding; now they will be bound by this government policy, should the Legislature pass this legislation. Again, the government is stepping in and telling these organizations that they know better.

What they are touting now all of a sudden is that these decisions should be based on merit. That's very ironic because this government has a track record, a history of hiring and giving opportunities to their political loyalists, their failed candidates, their party donors and insiders, former MLAs and politicians.

Mr. Chair, you will remember that back in 2019, 2020 they created the energy centre, and the first appointment as CEO for that energy centre was their failed candidate in Calgary-Buffalo. If we look at more recent appointments, the MLA for Sherwood Park, I believe Jordan Walker, was defeated in the 2023 election, and soon after he was appointed as manager of corporate development at Invest Alberta. His qualifications I was trying to look up, and the best I could find was that he was an ESL teacher in Japan before that. Then in Banff-Kananaskis MLA Miranda Rosin after her defeat was also appointed as Alberta's director of tourism strategy and policy, and I couldn't find much what her qualifications were before that. So there's a long list of individuals that were appointed as patronage appointments by this UCP government. The person who left the seat for then Premier Jason Kenney was appointed to something pretty cushy down in Texas soon after he resigned from that seat. The person who resigned for this Premier was also appointed to a policy adviser job in the Premier's office. And here now, interestingly, the UCP is preaching to us about merit-based appointments.

Quite frankly, I represent a riding that has a mostly first-generation, second-generation immigrant population, and not one of them ever talked to me about DEI hiring practice. Their issues are quite different, and the government has been choosing to fail them, has been failing them ever since they've been in power. Those are issues like recognition of foreign credentials. Like, the odds are stacked up against them in a way that they would never be able to kind of make it.

This government first passed a bill and then promised Albertans that now things will be changed and those processes will be streamlined and they will be able to get into the profession and professional jobs for which they have been trained, but nothing changed. Absolutely nothing changed. A year later it's pretty funny that another government private member came up with a committee about the same issue, to look at the foreign credentials, and at that time they said that this is the most novel idea and now this will change the game for those professionals and for those newcomers, and nothing has been changed. They are still struggling to get in.

Those who are already in professional jobs have to work way harder – I would say double, triple – than any other person in their profession. Some of them were forced to go back to South Africa or even U.K. to do the necessary house job placement that you need to become a doctor here. There are a number of people who did manage to, I guess, get their credentials recognized, but there are a lot more people that are still waiting for a clear process, for a more predictable path to get into the profession that they were trained for.

4:10

When we look at lots of issues in our education system and look at issues in our health care system, there is a shortage of professionals. There is a shortage of teachers. There is a shortage of doctors, nurses. The fact remains that almost a million Albertans don't have a family doctor. It's also, I guess, very clear that there are people who are already in our province who have those qualifications, who have those credentials, but this government is unwilling to work with them, with organizations that can help them streamline this process and help address teacher shortages, help address doctor and professional shortages. Instead, they would prefer to privatize health care so only the wealthy few are able to jump the queue and the rest will suffer in the public system.

Another thing. I find it very interesting that the government has thrown this piece in with a number of other unrelated pieces. For instance, in this bill they also included better legal protections for victims of sexual abuse, which on this side of the House we fully support. But they're putting it together. Like, even when they are doing something good, they can't do it without thinking of some kind of political gamesmanship. That piece falls under the Education Act, not even under the Justice minister's purview within the designation

of regulation, but they would prefer to play politics over doing the right thing and actually bringing that piece of legislation as stand-alone legislation. I will talk about that in a bit as well.

Then they also are proposing some changes to the Court of King's Bench Act. I want to start by saying that generally speaking I'm not in favour of taking jurisdiction away from the courts and giving it to tribunals or any other body and actually lowering the bar. What they're doing here is they are appointing application judges. To my knowledge they have not appointed anyone yet. There were two openings, and there is still no appointment insofar as I know, but I invite the minister or government members, if they know any update, to correct me on it.

What they are trying to do is they are trying to give those application judges more power than masters in chambers. I think they're trying to do what they can't do directly. They can't appoint King's Bench judges. That's a section in the Constitution that gives the federal government that power. And then they ran in a referendum about appointing those judges, and Albertans said no, the Premier's office alone shouldn't be appointing these judges. Instead of respecting what Albertans told them, now they find another way to make these appointments: application judges. Nobody really understands what their role will be because they haven't been appointed, but they're trying to do what they can't do directly.

There are a lot of questions about this, and I think the government should clarify these things, why it's needed. If they're really trying to address the backlogs and delays, there are other solutions that organizations representing the legal profession and many others have put out there that they can do to address those backlogs.

For the most part we have a full complement of superior court judges in the Court of King's Bench, in the Court of Appeal, with very few vacancies. The real issue is not the lack of judges. The real issue is the lack of available courtrooms, available clerks, available prosecutors: the administration of justice that's within the purview of this government. So instead of focusing on where they should and instead of staying in their own lane, they're trying to do something that they cannot do directly. Like, I hope that this change helps us with backlogs, but clearly it won't.

I've spoken to many professionals who are practising, I've spoken to retired judges as well, and what they clearly point out is that their new family justice strategy is more about keeping people out of court, making them jump more hoops before they can come before the judge. That's not what Albertans expect this government to do in dealing with the delays. The right thing to do would be hiring more clerks, hiring more support staff, prosecutors, opening more courtrooms. And if we have any shortage of judges, government can ask the federal government to create more – government can create and request more judges. That's not what they are doing. They are just, again, doing something that they are interested in, not what professionals and experts are asking them.

They are also making some amendments to King's Counsel legislation. Receiving King's Counsel as a lawyer is an honour, one that comes through years of service and hard work. While we respect that the changes here to this legislation are minimal, again there are still no definitive criteria that would assure a lawyer applying whether they will get it or not. It is a 10-year requirement, five years in Alberta and five years from any common-law jurisdiction, but still there are no objective criteria that would distinguish a lawyer with 10 years of practice who doesn't have KC and a lawyer with 10 years of practice who has KC. I think that if they were changing these criteria, they could have added some objective criteria, and that criteria should never be knowing the minister.

Changes to Alberta Law Foundation. What government is doing here is that they brought in a number of changes where they took over the Law Foundation money. They raided their reserves. They took over their decision-making power. They took over reg-making power for those organizations. Fourteen employees in protest resigned. And when everything was destroyed, now the government is walking back those changes. We in this House and many other Albertans, professionals warned this government then that what they were doing is against the rule of law. It's just using legislative power to steal money from an arm's-length organization. At that time government didn't listen. There is a lot more damage that was done that government should try to fix. Also, government should apologize to those 14 employees and all those grant recipients who were affected by government's legislative vandalism.

Then there is the Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act. These changes further transparency and reporting for public-sector compensation, including when reorganization happened, something we rarely see from this government. I think these are good changes, and we can get behind these changes.

Now to the changes with respect to intimate image distribution protection. These are really good changes, and we support furthering the protection for victims of sexual abuse that are laid out in this bill. These are important changes that will help ensure Alberta legislation is on track with an increasingly sophisticated digital landscape that has put women and children and everyone at an increased risk of online sexual abuse.

4:20

We also support clarifying that threatening to share an image is now an offence. The government has created some exceptions there, where a cause of action won't lie if those images were shared with good intentions and only to the extent necessary with legal counsels or support providers for workplace investigation and all those things.

I think that in this day and age we need to think about the impacts of online harms. We would have supported had government taken steps to ban social media for kids under a certain age. Many other jurisdictions – in Australia, New Zealand, Manitoba, B.C. – are considering it as well.

In short, I think there are a few things that are really good in this bill and there are certain things and certain amendments to the Alberta Human Rights Act that cannot be supported.

What I am requesting here, Mr. Chair, is that when it comes to the votes on Bill 33, clauses be severed as follows: section 1, concerning amendments to Alberta Human Rights Act, to be voted on as block A and all other sections be voted on as a block B.

With that, I will take my seat.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Thank you to the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall for your request. The past practice of this committee has been to allow a member to make a request to the chair of Committee of the Whole that the clauses of the bill be severed into blocks for the purposes of voting after debate on the bill has concluded.

In accordance with the member's request the clauses of Bill 33 will be severed into the following two voting blocks on which members will vote once debate on the bill at Committee of the Whole has concluded. Block A will consist of section 1. Block B will consist of section 2 to section 8.

For the clarity of all members, we will continue to debate all clauses of Bill 33 together, but when there are no further members wishing to speak to the bill, the votes will be put separately as explained. I hope that is clear. Thank you.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? I will recognize the Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well, I want to start off by using a quote from a very well-known individual. It might be a little fictional, but it's still relevant. The quote is "It's a trap," and that's by the wonderful Admiral Ackbar from *Star Wars*. That's exactly what this bill is.

It is a trap to continue this conversation and culture wars in the province of Alberta. It's one set by the UCP very cleverly, as they have done in times past, where they put in good elements of the bill, which include the sharing of intimate images, but also includes things like dealing with DEI, a problem that no one has asked for this government to address. Unfortunately, because they are put together in this omnibus bill, it really shows how serious the UCP are regarding victims of sexual abuse that they would again put their culture war stuff with this very important topic.

Mr. Chair, I do bring this up because in the Criminal Code of Canada we already have this codified in section 162.1, which was implemented in 2014 by the federal government. As this is a hybrid offence, it does have a maximum penalty of up to five to 10 years in prison and 14 if it is aggravated sexual assault. This is far above Alberta's two-year limit, which is jurisdictionally what it can put in place and legislatively must put in place. It is a regulatory law, not a criminal law, and it does address a lot of things that must go to talk about sharing of intimate images.

While we are severing this debate and voting on these as different blocks, I think it is important to highlight that we saw this government put in place really important pieces of legislation to address victims of domestic abuse in the last session, and in it they also put in another part of their culture war changes to legislation. Mr. Chair, this is just an ongoing pattern by this government of putting in little pieces of bad with the good, and unfortunately that is at the point where we have to stand up and talk about this because no one has asked for this. People have been asking us to focus on things like affordability or to address the long wait times in our hospital rooms or address the fact that housing is slowly becoming increasingly unobtainable for many folks in our cities. We see the folks living on the streets, we see folks living rough, and we should have governments that are focused intently on those matters, but instead we are focusing on this cultural war stuff that comes out of the United States.

Mr. Chair, I need to remind this Chamber that Charter rights still apply unless the government decides to use the notwithstanding clause for this. I know that there are conversations that are being had right now by this government about looking at the Alberta Human Rights Act. I know that cabinet is considering removing hate speech after an interview went pretty viral between the Premier with the whiner in chief at Rebel News. I worry that we are on a dangerous path where individuals that look like me, that sound like me, that lived an experience of living on the reserve are going to be the ones that are at target from this culture war trash.

Mr. Chair, I do want to make sure that we are very clear about addressing the serious topic of victims of sexual abuse and the sharing of intimate images, especially of minors. The Criminal Code does contemplate inclusions for this exact type of behaviour, and these maximums should be very, very importantly looked at in making sure that these offenders are not going to harm individuals in our community. But what we're really needing to focus on when we talk about DEI is that this is the first piece of legislation that this government put forward instead of addressing things like affordability or addressing the classroom sizes that are ballooning in our major cities. Instead, they're focusing on these cultural wars.

Mr. Chair, in the bill, particularly under provincial bodies, it has a broad definition of entities that receive provincial funding. In that I know there's an exemption that follows shortly after that, where it says that there's an exemption for First Nations and Métis settlement governments to be exempted from this piece of legislation, but Indigenous-serving organizations that receive provincial funding are not exempted. This should have been amended and should have been caught in the legislative drafting, but I guess that is the intention of this bill, to be far reaching and to ensure that no diversity, equity, inclusion is included in any decisions being made by any body in this province that serves our public. If we're not hiring racialized or queer folks or even women and our professions are no longer allowed to provide training on diversity, equity, and inclusion, what do we have? We have exclusion, exclusionary policy.

Mr. Chair, I really am quite concerned about where these movements are. I look at my legal profession and the changes that this government introduced that are now being walked back in this justice statutes amendment act. I heed the call from my friend from Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, who asked that the UCP should now apologize to those former Alberta Law Foundation employees and board who all quit because of this incursion into our profession, who are using the Alberta Law Foundation and the proceeds that go from that foundation to support legal aid when this government is the one that should be providing that support to legal aid, not the Alberta Law Foundation.

I would urge this government: do apologize to those former employees and the board that were, in effect, constructively dismissed because of the interference by the UCP in the Alberta Law Foundation and walk back their attacks from last session. In this bill the revocation of the minister's powers that he gave himself in a previous justice statutes amendment act is finally a good step in the right direction. But, Mr. Chair, it should not have been at this level. We should not have had to have the minister walk back this overreach that he put forth himself.

4:30

We also look at the petition increases for the number of Law Society special meetings. Why is the UCP in support of, to quote the Premier, election denialism, end quote, for lawyers and their petition process by increasing that number? I know that special meetings were a topic of importance when it came to cultural competency training, and perhaps this is where this change is stemming out of. But now that the government has done away with cultural competency training for lawyers in all professions, in all regulated professions in this province, I wonder why we're walking back the ability for lawyers to call special meetings. Why are we raising that bar for 2.5 per cent of the active members?

It just does not make sense, Mr. Chair, and for that reason, I can't support that portion of the bill. For the most part, the changes and the walk back to the minister's powers are a good thing, and I do support that. I appreciate that we have gotten some push-back from the law community.

Mr. Chair, I really do want to focus the balance of my remarks now on DEI; diversity, equity, and inclusion. If we look at the history of this debate, when we look at the way that – in the United States and here in Canada we've had this debate about this concept of affirmative action; this is from the 1950s, 1960s – where affirmative action was put in place to ensure that folks from marginalized communities, like Black folks in the United States or here in Canada, Indigenous peoples, were included in the hiring processes. Individuals that were working in employment and hiring had to revise their way of looking at candidates and look at increasing the important contributions of Black folks and Indigenous folks in the workplace.

Mr. Chair, if we look at some policy discussions coming out of the United States, the African American Policy Forum provided a policy document, that I will table tomorrow at my next opportunity, called the affirmative action myth buster. According to the U.S. Labour department the primary beneficiaries of affirmative action in the States were white women. When we talk about affirmative action, it's not to say that we are not hiring people based on the

benefits and the merit that they have. We're not hiring folks that do not have the capabilities to do this work. This is a big conversation that – we are not new to this. This conversation started in the 1950s and 1960s. History is important in this debate, where we look at the way that queer folks, 2SLGBTQIA members have been treated by governments in years past.

This past summer I was honoured to be part of a first in this country, the Thunderhead monument unveiling in Ottawa, which recognized the harms of the program that was in place in the 1950s to the early 1990s. During the Cold War there was an apparatus developed by the RCMP, and it's similar in the United States. They had the Lavender Scare, where there was this idea that queer individuals or 2SLGBTQIA-plus members were more prone to Soviet Union incursions and persuaded by communist ideology. It was machine-measured physiological responses, so things like pupil dilations and nervous system reactions like sweating or being visibly uncomfortable. It was debunked shortly after this was used, that these flawed assumptions about pupillary and nervous system reactions were not appropriate. What subsequently happened in that time was the 2SLGBTQIA-plus purge, where there were over 9,000 civil servants who were interrogated and harassed and fired over the term of the 1950s and the early 1990s. These are military members and RCMP officers. These are civil servants that were serving our community.

Mr. Chair, this is the crux of systemic discrimination. This is why these programs exist. This is why we have this conversation about including diverse and equity-seeking individuals and inclusive spaces in our workplaces, and by identifying provincial bodies that are serving the public, that serve the very people that require these services. To not have employees that look like them, that understand their world view, is dangerous, and it's dangerous because we've seen it before.

For those that might be movie buffs, *Fellow Travelers* is a film that you can watch. It features Jonathan Bailey and Matt Bomer, and it talks about the Lavender Scare in the United States and how this program operated, and it's very similar to what happened here in Canada. There's another documentary called *The Fruit Machine* that you can watch about Canada's history here and how queer individuals were targeted by the government, and it has led to the importance of including DEI perspectives into our hiring processes.

Mr. Chair, I come from two communities that are affected by government policy and government decision-making. I'm a status Indian. I have a card to prove it, and it was only until 1951 that the ban ended for First Nations, for status Indians, to hire lawyers or even become lawyers themselves and not lose status. If I was born in a different decade, I would have lost my status as a status Indian, not that the government can dictate who I am or who I'm not. I will always be a strong and proud Nehiyaw man, but the last Indigenous lawyer before the ban came in place was in 1865. I'm so glad that after that ban ended in 1951, the first lawyer to be called to the bar and to not lose status was Mr. Wuttunee from the Red Pheasant Cree Nation in Saskatchewan in 1954. That was three years, if you're counting out there, after the ban ended. Three years of law school that he finished and got called to the bar.

Mr. Chair, history is so important in this debate. That same language that we were using in the 1950s and 1960s between affirmative action and now DEI are the same, and the debate has not changed. We're talking about merit when merit is not something that we are discounting. People get their jobs based on their capabilities and abilities to do this job, and that's all we're asking for. That's all anybody that has different life experience than most of the cabinet across the way, that have lived experiences that add to the richness and the vibrancy of our beautiful province.

Mr. Chair, there's an article that came out today in the Canadian HR Reporter by Sarah Dobson. I will also table this at my earliest opportunity. It's called Why Alberta's DEI Ban Gets 'Merit' Backwards. I'd like to pull out a quote here. In that article, she says

> . . . people like to stick with what they know. People like the familiar, the similar, the tried-and-true. So, they're often going to pick a job candidate who is comforting that way, whether from the same university or the same race, gender or culture.

Mr. Chair, this is not made up science; this is backed up by research. In that article that quotes a study that was done by Dr. Dianne Dechief and Philip Oreopoulos from the U of T called Why Do Some Employers Prefer to Interview Matthew but Not Samir? No offence to any of those that might have the same name in the Chamber. It found that when the names were swapped between an English-sounding name for Indian or Pakistani or Chinese names, there was a greater likelihood that individuals would be hired.

Mr. Chair, it's not because people that are from a group that deserves equity-seeking employment, that they do not have the merit. You have to go through the hoops of obtaining these degrees, of receiving the education to enter into these spaces. I can tell you that my profession is a wonderful one that does include diverse voices. Just yesterday I got to meet some future lawyers who are all Black women and who are all leading the charge at the University of Alberta to ensure that our profession reflects the community that we all come from. When we have diversity at the core of our decision-making, we are not harmed by it. We are further enhancing the way that we are making decisions.

4:40

In another study by the Boston Consulting Group, that studied 1,700 companies in eight different countries, they found that those companies that had above average diversity in leadership earned 45 per cent of their revenue from innovation compared with 26 per cent with average or below average diversity in their leadership positions. Mr. Chair, that is why diversity brings such richness to our communities and to our companies and to the employment spheres. The very public sector that our public receives services from, the very ones that are able to speak their language, that understand their morals and values, and understand that sometimes when you run on different times – we all have different words for it; many of our cultures have different terms – we know that that's something that we can expect, and that's something that brings that rich vibrancy that unfortunately this bill does not touch upon.

I am grateful for my friend from Calgary-Bhullar-McCall for asking to separate these blocks because I'm happy to support portions of this bill that don't go into things of culture war changes, like the Alberta Human Rights Act amendments. Mr. Chair, this bill and the portions that do focus on what we need to focus on in protecting individuals from nonconsensual distribution of intimate images is important in our modern world where phones are minicomputers in our pocket. Identifying deepfakes, for which AI and the proliferation of AI is creating a platform where these images are replicated and used in nefarious ways.

Mr. Chair, while I support a balance of this bill, I cannot support the other because this is again a trap, to quote Admiral Ackbar. And it's for these reasons that I will be voting accordingly, and I urge everyone in this Chamber to vote accordingly and refer that portion of the Alberta Human Rights Act to committee to review and revise, because diversity, equity, and inclusion is a benefit for all of us and ensures every single voice in this beautiful fabric of Alberta is heard.

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

Member Gurtej Brar: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Victims of deepfakes, victims of sextortion, people whose most private images are shared

without their consent: one part of Bill 33 protects all of them. It covers images made or altered with AI. It covers threats to share. It creates a new offence with real fines and real jail time.

Mr. Chair, I'm a dad, and I have teenagers at my home. As other parents, I often see them glued to the screen, living in the digital world, watching, talking, and listening to people they never met and may never see again. I feel worried. One fake picture, one fake video, one AI-altered image, that's all, just one: it can ruin a young person's life. We have seen so many cases in Canada and worldwide where young people lost their lives because someone harassed them online or spread fake photos or videos of them.

Before politics, I worked in media. I saw how fast an image travels, and it's impossible to reverse the damage when it's done. That's why I have pushed it on for a very long time and I urged people to know what their kids watch all the time. Finally this government is acting on people's pleas, long due, and that's a good thing.

But this government took these protections and tied them to something else entirely, changes to the Alberta Human Rights Act. Two completely different things, Mr. Chair. Part of this bill is written to strip out diversity, equity, and inclusion. It's meant to make hard-working people feel like they stole the job from someone else.

I'm asking the UCP government: why one bill? Why one vote? Why did this government bring one omnibus bill dealing with two unrelated yet important issues? Why don't we deal with these issues in different bills so our constituents can know what we stand for and what we do not stand for? Voting against DEI should not be a vote against protecting our children. That's not a real choice, Mr. Chair. That's a trap. It was built on purpose.

Mr. Chair, I represent Edmonton-Ellerslie. My constituents came here from every corner of the world. They drive trucks through the night. They work long shifts in our hospitals. They teach our kids. They open small businesses and work seven days a week to keep them going. Many of them came with degrees from back home: engineers, nurses, teachers. Some started driving cabs or stocking shelves just to get their foot in the door. They did not complain. They worked. They did not ask for special treatment; they asked for a fair shot. They did not ask for rules bent in their favour; they asked for a level playing field.

That's what section 10.1 in the Human Rights Act is about, fair treatment to everyone. It says that a program meant to improve the condition for disadvantaged people is not discrimination; people held back because of their race, because of disability, because of gender, because of faith, because of age. It does not force anyone to hire anyone. It does not lower a single standard, Mr. Chair. It simply prevents discrimination, and that's what this government wants to ban.

This government designed the bill not to help people but to confuse people. Otherwise, why would this government put these pieces together? What does the deepfake law have to do with hiring on a school board? Nothing, Mr. Chair. What does sextortion have to do with training at city hall? Nothing. What does protecting a kid from online harm have to do with well-qualified, well-skilled, honest workers trying to find a decent job in the public sector? Nothing.

I can't say better than my colleague from Calgary-Currie that there is no guiding theme here. There is no principle. And she's right. There is no common thread here except one: making it hard for us to say no to DEI. Victims of online abuse deserve a law that stands on its own, a law every member can vote for proudly without strings. Instead, this government used them as a cover. My colleague from Calgary-Klein said that members should not be forced into an all-or-nothing vote. That's exactly what this is, Mr. Chair. Victims should not be shielded for a political agenda.

4:50

At second reading the Alberta NDP moved to send this bill to committee so everyone can look at these pieces properly, to give Albertans a voice before we change their human rights law. That's what committees are for: to hear directly from people, to test the details, to get it right. The government voted it down, Mr. Chair, and that tells you a lot about this government's intent. If this omnibus was an accident, they would have welcomed the fix. They didn't because it wasn't an accident. It was a plan. My colleague from Calgary-Edgemont put it best. If the UCP are going to divide anything, maybe they should divide this bill. Divide the bill, not Albertans.

The DEI part fixes nothing, and it reaches everywhere. This government's own officials say that provincial employees are already hired based on merit. Their words, not mine, Mr. Chair. Reporting showed that the province has no data on how many so-called DEI hires there are. None. So this is built to fix a problem that government can't find, can't count, and can't explain because this problem does not exist anywhere except in the government's mind.

I spent years in media and oil and gas. I have a lot of friends from that work. Not one of them ever told me that they were hired because of DEI or promoted because of DEI, not once. In my whole career I never heard of it. But I did hear about people who had worked twice as hard just to get into that room.

So where is the problem? The unions that represent provincial workers say the same things. Public employees are hired as the best person for the job. If the merit is the rule, why are we here, Mr. Chair? Because this was never about merit. It is about sending a message, and families in my riding hear that message loud and clear: a message of discrimination, a message of divisive politics, a message that one Albertan somehow is less valuable than others.

Look at how far it's going to reach: agencies, Crown corporations, postsecondary institutions, school boards, municipalities, local councils, maybe nonprofits that get grants. Which ones? We don't know because cabinet is going to decide it later by regulation. Rural Municipalities said it loud and clear that they weren't even consulted, not consulted on a law that tells them how to hire, not now about a training ban.

The minister will say that training needed for the job is still allowed, but think about real life. DEI training is not about giving special treatment to someone. It's about learning about people who look different. It is not about White versus Brown or White versus Black. It is not about dividing communities. It is not about wedging communities against each other. It's about bringing all communities together.

The bill also says that mandatory training must be ideologically neutral. Why does this government think DEI is ideology? "D" means diversity, "E" means equity, and "I" means inclusion. Where is that "ideology" word in there, Mr. Chair? None. You know where actually ideology is really there? This government banning flags in school. This government allowing people in school not to stand during the national anthem. This government wasting $200 million on a divisive referendum. An ideology of hatred, division, and anger: that's all about this UCP government. Human rights laws belong to Albertans, not cabinet.

This government talks a lot about merit, so let's talk about merit. The *Globe and Mail* reported that five relatives of one businessman, Sam Mraiche, got public-sector jobs, four in government and one in AHS. The same businessman whose company got more than $600 million in health care business as reported and now investigated by the RCMP. So I have a simple question for the minister. What were the criteria? Was there a job posting? Was there any competition?

Who else applied? This government said that DEI is the problem. Was hiring family friends of the Minister of Justice DEI? It wasn't merit, for sure, Mr. Chair. It was merit? Show Albertans if it's there. If you can't explain those hires, don't lecture anyone else about how to hire.

Some have said that the opposition would not dare stand up on this issue. Here I am because my constituents are not asking for this. They are worried about grocery bills that keep them going, about finding a family doctor, Mr. Chair, about kids in crowded schools. They are worried about those things. That's what they are asking this government to fix. Instead, the first bill of this sitting is about a problem its own official says does not exist.

Mr. Chair, I believe in merit. Every person in my community believes in merit. They have lived it. They have earned every single thing they have. But merit and fairness are not opposite. You can't measure merit fairly if half of the room never gets through the door.

So here is my caucus's stance. We will support protecting families and victims always, and we will not pretend the rest of the bill is acceptable. I will ask the minister directly. If DEI hiring puts unqualified people into a job, name one, just one Albertan hired this way who could not do the work. Maybe he can point out those five people I just mentioned. If this government can't name a single one, then what are we really doing here?

Stop hiding behind victims. A fair shot is not a favour, Mr. Chair. It is a promise this province made to every Albertan, every person who came from every corner of the world. Take this part out, and we will support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any others wishing to provide comments?

Ready for the question on Bill 33?

We will proceed with the request to sever clauses of Bill 33, so we will split them off. Block A includes section 1. Block B will include sections 2 to 8.

[Section 1 of Bill 33 agreed to]

[Sections 2 to 8 of Bill 33 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.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

5:00

Mr. Williams: I move that the committee rise and report Bill 33.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

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

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 33.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading
(continued)

Bill 34
Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2026

[Adjourned debate October 29: Mr. Williams]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any wishing to enter debate? The Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 34, Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2026. Well, once again the UCP has presented a watered-down version of an NDP idea, which is actually quite funny because the phrase you hear very often in this place is, "We will take nothing from that side. We will take nothing from the NDP," and then they turn around and do it. It's kind of funny, but you know what? I guess when someone imitates you, it is a form of a compliment, so thank you.

Once again the UCP will make Albertans wait until regulations are developed to evaluate the effectiveness of this bill. While the bill expands consumer protection, which we support, it does not address affordability. They like to wrap things in affordability; it doesn't necessarily mean that it makes any measurable or observable changes. As you know – I'm sure you know; my constituents tell me on a regular basis – affordability in Alberta is top of mind. People can't afford living. Rents have gone up. Housing prices have gone up. Everything has gone up.

Alberta has experienced increases that exceed other provinces. From 2019 to 2026 – that would be the period that the UCP have been in control, been in power – consumer prices overall have increased 25 per cent. A 37.5 per cent increase in grocery prices, a 31.8 per cent increase in shelter prices, a 19.4 per cent increase in average hourly wage, which you'll notice doesn't really keep up to the inflation bits, and electricity, auto insurance, and postsecondary tuition are just some of the other things that have escalated in price.

Now, we also have the lowest minimum wage in Canada. That is shameful, that people have to take multiple low-income, low-wage jobs to support themselves and their families. It's also pretty disgusting that this government reduced the youth minimum wage by $2 and never bothered to restore it, and subsequently we saw enormous changes in unemployment of youth or the ability to find work. Again, the UCP making decisions that actually go in the opposite direction of where we need to be going in terms of affordability.

Now, here's another example. I'm going to give you this example when we talk about affordability, and I'm quite sure that you'll be able to sort of envision what I'm talking about. This government has time after time introduced legislation or policies that they say are helping Albertans in terms of affordability, helping Albertans manage affordability, but what we've been saying, Mr. Speaker, is that they're actually doing the opposite. I mean, there are a few things that they're doing to help their friends and buddies, but on the whole they are not addressing the affordability problem here in Alberta.

How have they made it worse? Here's an example. This government stood here and told severely disabled Albertans that they didn't need the new disability benefit that the federal government chose to give them to help cushion against disability poverty. These guys, literally multiple ministers and the Premier herself, stood up and said: "You know what? AISH is generous enough." That's under

$2,000 a month to live. Someone with a severe disability most likely needs equipment, medication, personal care assistance, accessible transportation. I don't know what's so funny back there, you guys.

Instead, what this government has done to address the affordability of life for people with disabilities – what they do is create a two-tiered system so they can cut even further. You've already removed the $200 Canada disability benefit, and now you're going to cut ADAP, which is actually just AISH 2.0, whatever it is, just AISH with work. You've cut another $200. The only reason that you put a grant in place to buffer that cut was because you had a lot of pressure on you from your own constituents, and I expect that will continue to mount.

You have created a worse problem for people, about 80,000 people here in Alberta that are already extremely vulnerable, that already disproportionately make up the number of people that are accessing food banks every single week. You have made the problem worse, and to make things even worse, you gaslight people by saying: ah, it's generous enough. How the hell would you know?

An Hon. Member: Hey.

Ms Renaud: Excuse me; I take that back. I apologize for saying "hell." I said it again. Sorry about that. Lost my train of thought here.

Okay, so what we have done . . . [interjection] Excuse me? Do you have something to say?

The Acting Speaker: Order. Through the chair, please.

Ms Renaud: This government would rather make life more expensive, more difficult for people, and at the same time say: we're making life more affordable. It's just laughable. These folks: instead of really examining the problem of life is just too expensive for people, they would rather play games like policing libraries, gerrymandering, cheating.

You know, we've got a lemon law. We've got a lemon law, which is great. Certainly happy to see that. I would hate to have a piece of equipment like is described in the legislation. I'm glad that the lemon law is here, but what about the people that can't afford a car? What about the people that can't afford maintenance on the car, can't get winter tires, can't even replace the windshield wiper blade, can't even buy a bus pass? That's what affordability or lack of affordability looks like.

Now, there are a number of pieces in this legislation that are absolutely fine, but that's what this government does. They create omnibus after omnibus after omnibus to dilute the debate that we have in this place so that not every MLA gets to weigh in on a topic. That's what this government does. We're on number 11: 11 omnibus bills, red tape reduction where you have shoved everything but the kitchen sink in it to camouflage really bad stuff with stuff that we all agree on. That is manipulative, and that's an erosion of democracy right there, the fact that you are governing by omnibus bill and then hiding policy. You all should be ashamed of yourselves. That is the opposite of transparency. These ministers will stand up and say: this is our approach to transparency; look at us. You are anything but.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The other piece that I was sort of wondering about, that I want to touch on, is the surface rights. Now, I don't know if any of you will remember way back when – I mean, it was sort of during COVID, so everything was a bit weird back then – but in 2021 the UCP stood up and preached to all of us about the efficiency and cost savings to consolidate a number of bodies into the Land and Property Rights Tribunal. You might also remember that the members on this side did not support that piece of legislation.

Now, only a few years later, we are recreating the specialized agency the same government eliminated. They eliminated it saying that it wasn't necessary, that this one point of contact was going to be great. It was going to speed everything up. It was going to be fair to landowners. No, that didn't happen. But the sad part is that this government didn't even report on those problems or share with the Legislature: "You know what? This legislation is not working. Let's fix it." But this is a pattern with this government. They rush, rush, rush to throw out legislation, and then you have to backtrack and fix the glaring errors or omissions that you have made in your legislation. It's unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, that the Surface Rights Board is just another example of that.

5:10

So why did it change? What motivated the change in the first place? You know, if we had a government that was truly transparent, when we actually got the legislation in 2021, they would have explained: here's the work that we did to consult, here is the piece of legislation that is a result of that consultation, here are the stakeholders that wanted it, here's what the bill will do, and here's how we'll monitor its progress. None of that stuff happens. You just have a government that stands up and says: "Oh, yeah. This is great. We didn't really consult because we have all the answers. Let's just pass it. All good." But then a few years later we're going to have to do it again because you kind of screwed up.

When you fail to consult – and this is just the most recent example of that – the actual people that will be impacted by the legislation or the policy, you're going to get it wrong. You're always going to get it wrong. Unfortunately, you continue to have to learn this lesson, as I expect you will again after this. You will always get it wrong when you don't speak to the correct people.

So why did the surface rights change? Where did that come from? Is it actually going to fix the problem that the stakeholders have identified? And why on earth, if you're so proud of your consumer protection, wouldn't you just put it out there on its own? Instead, you've got to throw this stuff in there. Why? What is the purpose? Is your legislative agenda just so packed that you can't manage to split it up, or are you just trying to jam up the opposition? What you're doing is really diluting democracy again. Shouldn't be surprised. This is the latest in this activity.

While I agree with a number of pieces in this omnibus legislation, obviously – these are ideas we supported when our own colleague brought it forward as a private member bill. Y'all borrowed it. You're welcome. You know, go ahead and use it. Yeah. It's unfortunate that you continue to govern with omnibus legislation that you all know is not the correct way to do this. You all know it, but you continue.

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Ms Renaud: Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. member, you need to . . .

Ms Renaud: Yeah. All done.

The Speaker: No, no. I get to speak. When I address you, you need to hear what I have to say. You need to speak through the chair as opposed to the comments directly across the aisle, please.

Thank you.

Ms Renaud: All done. Thank you.

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

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 34, Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction Statutes

Amendment Act, 2026. The bill, as my colleague, the previous speaker, has said, you know, proposes some watered-down implications of the proposals that we brought in in the previous session not long ago. That was just earlier this year. As much as I still support this bill, the proposals under this bill and the pattern of this ministry's work in the past seven years still raise a lot of questions and concerns to its mandate, how it is committed to eliminate the barriers to serve Albertans and what it exactly has done in the past seven years.

When I'm looking at this, when we debated this bill in the past session, private member's Bill 210, I brought it forward after a lot of advocacy in the communities and consulting stakeholders and in the background of the biggest data breach in the history of this province and the public outcry and receiving thousands and thousands of e-mails into our offices requesting to do something to protect them against the potential fraud due to the data breach. Before bringing the proposals we not only heard from Albertans but also did a lot of work to do jurisdictional scans of what other provinces are doing to protect people from credit fraud.

The bill was debated, and the minister basically did not have anything to say against our proposals. He was very confident that Alberta already had enough to protect Albertans in case of fraud even though there was a lot of evidence of the number of people being defrauded and the amount being lost is in the billions of dollars in Canada and Alberta was not immune to it. All the evidence, all the debates could not really convince the ministry to accept that proposal and support that very bill.

Similarly, Bill 209 was brought forward to protect Albertans against many things, but one of the things was ticket prices, ticket sales cost protections, resale of tickets protections, and the minister also refused to support that bill.

Similarly, I've seen that bill go through this ministry in 2021 to amalgamate the Surface Rights Board into the Land and Property Rights Tribunal. The stakeholders raised concerns, and this ministry didn't listen to that. Five years after that this House is working on the same thing they have done without listening to Albertans. Now we are spending the precious time of the House to just reversing something they shouldn't have done in the first place.

This so-called, you know, red tape reduction ministry has been shuffled so many times and moved from one ministry to the other ministry, and they have yet to prove that they have done something concrete to help Albertans. As my colleagues have actually eloquently spoken about, Albertans are asking for so many different things.

Even the private member's bill from my colleague the Member for Calgary-Acadia was defeated, a bill to bring accountability and transparency in the health care system by providing a reporting on patient outcomes. This was not something hard to do because the government already works on that and the government already collects the data. But any time there is a question about government accountability, transparency, or improving service by improving accountability, this government, you know, without much debate just comes in and stands against it and votes it down.

Now we have come back to this House after a huge – huge – setback, and the UCP won't be able to recover during this term, I tell you that. There's a clear verdict by Albertans on their infamous, shameful act, focused on dividing Albertans on the separatist agenda. So they spent and they wasted time. They spent the last two years not focusing on their promise that they made in the election but to cover up the scandals this government was involved in. They tried to distract Albertans by bringing those divisive politics and separatist agenda. Eventually Albertans gave a very clear verdict. They could not even secure 25 per cent of support from the entire province, the whole province. The UCP is in a shock wave. They don't know what to do.

5:20

They can do a lot of things. They can deliver on their own promises that they made not even long ago, the promise they made at even the beginning of this year, after the death of Sreekumar Prashant at the Grey Nuns hospital. They said that they would bring triage nurses and triage doctors into the hospitals. After 10 whole months we have yet to see the improvements and have yet to see the action.

There are a lot of things to do. There are so many schools. I know my colleagues are questioning every single day. My constituents are coming to my office every single day on schools. The communities were built, like, 10, 15 years ago, and they still have yet to see a school coming to those communities. The government actually were grandstanding announcements almost two years before. Oh, $8 billion is being, you know, spent on education to build new schools. Even two or three years after we have got to see where that $8 billion has gone.

Similarly, when they cancelled the south-side hospital, they tried to deflect and distract Albertans that they're building an independent Stollery hospital instead. Like, where is that? Three, four years of that announcement, we see, oh, a million dollars coming for the planning stage of that independent Stollery hospital. Still in the planning stage.

There are ways if you're willing to take a lesson, if you're willing to learn from what Albertans are telling you, what message Albertans are giving you constantly for the past three years. Instead, they have come up with this. We still support it, because we're going to support each and every effort that provides any sort of protection to Albertans, even though they have copied a lot of stuff from us. Their scope is so narrow compared to that. It seems to be that they're trying to recover from the setback and the shame they have gone through during the referendum boarding process. We see that they're trying to reverse some of their own work to grandstand in this House and outside the Assembly, to tell people that, oh, they're focusing on something really important to people without telling the large number of issues they're trying to address in this bill that were created by them, under the UCP government in the past five years.

I wanted to conclude, actually, my remarks by saying that we support the proposals in this bill, but it's very unfortunate that the people have to go through another 10 months without protection in this province because of this minister's refusal to listen to us, listen to Albertans and what they were demanding even in the background of something historic, unprecedented, in this province and the public outcry requesting and demanding protection from potential fraud.

I heard so many concerns from my constituents around growing prices, cost of living, and low wages. The wage when this UCP government came in was highest in the country, but it has led us to the lowest wage in the country under this UCP government. It's so shameful that this government is not focusing on the real concerns Albertans are facing every single day.

With that, I conclude my remarks. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am thrilled to rise to address Bill 34 today. I wanted to talk about two sort of main things here. One is around surface rights and some of my concerns, and it's difficult to say, honestly, one way or the other. The UCP took this board out. They put this board in. They changed the name of things. Like, it's honestly hard to say substantively what these provisions are doing although I do definitely agree that we need change.

The other piece I wanted to talk about is some of the consumer protection pieces, which I think are, in principle, good. I think what concerns me a little more is, for instance, what my colleague from Edmonton-Meadows was just saying. Some of these protections were proposed by him in a private member's bill mere months ago, and my colleagues across the aisle rejected it out of hand. I'm curious why it was a bad idea then and it's a good idea now.

I think that these protections are a good idea regardless, and I think that when Albertans talk about sides of this Legislature working together, this is not an equal, both-sides problem that is occurring here. As minister I passed three separate private members' bills. The UCP have never passed one of our bills, and I think that that's a real concern, and I think it's a real concern that some of these ideas were bad when we proposed them but good when they proposed them. That's not the substance of the issue, Mr. Speaker. We're not dealing with the substance of the issue. I think that's a concern for me.

On the Surface Rights Board. In 2021 the UCP removed this board, saying that it would reduce red tape. Now here we are back in 2026 and the UCP is proposing to bring back the board, saying that it will reduce red tape. I'm curious which it is. I mean – I don't know – maybe they've changed their mind. Maybe they've had an epiphany of some sort. I don't think we'll ever hear that. I think that's what concerns me. Do you know what I mean? We go from one thing to the other thing to the next thing and no reasoning is ever given, like, as if they don't feel that they owe an explanation to the public on these issues of substantive public policy. Whoever is in charge, whether it's the Surface Rights Board, whether it's any other board, there are some serious issues that need to be addressed on this file. There are some serious concerns.

5:30

Orphan wells are obviously a problem. It is a problem that this government has proposed to solve by way of making taxpayers foot a bill that isn't theirs. That liability belongs to the companies. We have a system to deal with that. What we need to do is regulate that system properly rather than downloading the cost onto the taxpayers of Alberta. And they can call it R-star. They can call it liability management incentive program. They can call it mature asset strategy. Mr. Speaker, it's all the same thing. It's taxpayers paying for companies that didn't clean up their mess.

I hasten to add that energy companies who are doing a good job, who are cleaning up their messes, are not delighted by the fact that money might flow to those who are not doing the right thing, who are not taking care of their own liabilities. So this isn't an issue of being for or against. I think it's an issue of companies cleaning up their own messes, and I think Albertans agree with that. I don't think it matters what the UCP tries to rename it because Albertans, I think, are smart enough to follow that bouncing ball regardless.

I think my concern with this bill is that we see the board coming back, but we don't have enough details to know whether it will address these substantive issues. I want to talk for a moment about the rights of landowners. These are rights that need to be respected, and there have been issues ongoing for an incredibly long time. The UCP set up a committee to study this. They got rid of the board. They're bringing the board back. It feels a lot like breaking AHS into an endless number of entities and calling that fixing health care while the system actively deteriorates. This doesn't, as far as I can tell, address any of the issues.

Recently long-time advocate Mark Dorin exhausted every legal option, and he has been in litigation on these issues and advocating on these issues and, you know, bringing public consideration to these issues for years, I think more than a decade, actually, at this point. Eventually he had to block Maga Energy from entering his property in order to get this government's attention, and I think that's really, really sad. The way in which his rights were not respected is very problematic. At its most basic level it's just not fair to have a right in law and have no practical recourse, to have no agency. That is the one stop that can ensure that those rights are respected.

If a company is going to rent your land and use it for any purpose, oil and gas or anything else, they need to pay their dues or not be allowed onto the property. That's not an unreasonable ask. This isn't some, you know, flaky demand. He's asking that these companies do what they promised to do, which is to pay their rent and to clean up when they're done.

The way the system handles orphaned and abandoned wells is itself problematic. We have the problem of the things that are officially dumped into the orphan well category, but for years before companies can leave these open for extended periods of time. They don't fall into that category yet, and they're just there on people's lands leaking God knows what and doing God knows – sorry. Gosh. I apologize, Mr. Speaker. I withdraw that one. Sorry. Leaching who knows what into the soil and damaging people's health.

I think that a lot of folks, Mr. Dorin included, who are in this situation have in ways been gaslit by the system. They are told that they have a right, and they have no practical way to ensure that right is respected. I think that that is an awful thing to do to people. So I hope, although I will admit to a significant degree of skepticism, that something substantial is going to follow behind these changes and these renamings. I hope that there will actually be an addressing of this. In law we call this sort of situation, where officially you have a right but practically no way to exercise it – they call the distinction, like, de facto and de jure. I would call it poppycock in more colloquial speak, and I think these advocates have been ignored for far too long.

Yeah. I will leave it there, but I am not convinced that this rearranging of the chairs on the deck will have any more of a substantive impact than what happened with rearranging AHS. I think we'll wind up with more CEOs and more salaries and lots of money being spent and no one getting better service. I shall hope that I am wrong because I am a very optimistic person, but that is where I will leave that.

On the affordability pieces this bill does a bunch of different things. The defective vehicles piece, the lemon laws: I think they're great. I think we don't have a lot of details, again, and I'm curious about why we don't have a lot of details. It kind of seems like this sort of came forward with not a lot of consideration having gone into it. I am glad to see the government acting on this. This is something that is, like – Albertans actually care about this, and that has not been what we've been seeing from this government, action on issues Albertans care about, so I think that's a good thing.

Right to repair. Also very much in favour of this. I do have to shout out my colleague from Edmonton-Manning, who has been a tireless advocate on this file. People invest a massive amount of money in farm equipment, and they deserve not to have it expire and become irreparable. Like, that's unfair. It's an unfair thing to do to them, and they deserve to have those protections. I hope it is well implemented. I am very glad to see it. I think that, honestly, on a number of different issues this could be important. When we think about sort of the amount of trash we're generating as a society, I think this is super important.

I'll deviate briefly into a personal story. My dishwasher broke down, and the dishwasher is about 12 years old. I wouldn't consider this a very old dishwasher. My parents had their dishwasher for 30-plus years. Anyway, the dishwasher breaks down, someone comes in to look at it and says, "It's the circuit board, but, like, you might as well replace it," and I'm like: "No, thank you. I would like to fix

the dishwasher and keep the dishwasher I have. It's working just fine otherwise."

Anyway, this gentleman tells me that they don't make the chip anymore because this dishwasher is so incredibly ancient 12 years on, and I think that's really problematic. I just do. I don't know. Maybe I'm old fashioned. My parents had dishwashers and fridges and washing machines that lasted for literal decades. It's unclear to me why the progress of history has resulted in these things now having a life expectancy that's less than a decade and us being unable to repair them, but I don't like it. I would like to go back to the way it is, and if this does anything to advance that issue, I think that's really important. But particularly when it comes to farm equipment, I think it's very, very important legislation.

Credit protection. This is important. It was important when my colleague from Edmonton-Meadows proposed it, and that's sort of the source of my concern here because people these days, reasonable people, most of whom tend to distribute on a bell curve and kind of fall in the middle: what they want to see from people in this Legislature is working together. My answer back, Mr. Speaker, is that I don't think this is an equally both-sides problem. I'm not saying it's not a both-sides problem at all, but I'm saying it's not equally distributed. My colleague proposed this bill less than six months ago. It was shot down with very little consideration, and now suddenly it's a thing that the government is doing. I'm glad they're doing it, but why was it a bad idea when it was being proposed by this side of the House?

The same with ticket reselling. My colleague from Calgary-Currie proposed that bill. Why is it okay now, but it wasn't okay when she said it? Mr. Speaker, fractious as things may be in here and we disagree on issues of substance, I think that's important. I think people deserve to see us disagree in that way, but whose name is on the bill is not an issue of substance. It just isn't, so to see this come forward after being rejected mere months ago is extremely disappointing to me, to say the least. I don't understand the fragility, I guess.

5:40

Presently before the House is a bill that amends an act that came in in 2018. It was proposed by the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul. It was a good idea, so we passed it when we were in government. That bill was in my ministry. It was in Justice, and we passed it because it was a good idea. It was one of three bills I passed from private members that were not in my party. I think that's how this place used to operate, and I guess I'm just expressing sadness that it doesn't operate like that anymore. I thought it was a good thing. To be clear, the minister is proposing amendments to that around the distribution of intimate images to include AI. Those amendments are good. What I'm curious about is why I can say that and no one over there can. Why is it that I can say something that the other side has done is a good idea, but no one from the UCP can acknowledge that anything done by anyone over here is a good idea?

Yeah. I mean, look, I don't expect Albertans to have sympathy for this. I've picked my lot in life. I live in a place where we are fractious and contentious and we argue things out, and sometimes we have a lot of feelings about that, and I think that that is good and right. I think that this is the people's House and this is the place for debate, and mostly I like it, but I am disappointed.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words in regard to Bill 34, talking about a number of amendments in different parts of our economy. Again, I share many of the comments that I've heard previously from my colleagues that these are things that, you know, we can do and can make life better for Albertans. Where ideas come from I'm a little more ambivalent on. I mean, certainly, we did put forward a number of these things in the last few months, and now here they are. That's kind of what we have to work with, the moment, and we're happy to help along some of these bills.

We did in fact write up and debate these in our own caucus, so we have some authority and some expertise in regard to credit protections from Edmonton-Meadows. We have consumer protection with tickets coming from one of our colleagues and so forth and the right to repair from Edmonton-Manning. I know she has been talking about that for a long time.

I'd actually like to start there because, you know, part of introducing protections in this bill is to make sure that you can actually deliver on them, and part of what the strategy is for a lot of manufacturers these days is an old concept, really, but it's just accelerated, which is planned obsolescence. My colleague from Calgary-Mountain View had a good example of that with her dishwasher. You can buy new dishwashers, though. It's not a bad idea. The new ones are way quieter, and they clean and you don't even know it's on. You have to have a light that even shows that it's on because it doesn't make any noise.

Also, even this more specialized thing, and we see it in farm equipment now quite a lot, which is you literally cannot fix – you're not allowed as part of your contract to fix your tractor or your combine. You have to do it with, let's say, a John Deere dealer. I mean, that's part of how they build their pricing. That's part of their strategy, their corporate strategy. So I'm just wondering. I can ask this government how you're going to deal with that. Of course, they have built it into the contract when you buy these machines. They're incredible machines. They're incredibly expensive, right? I mean, these are the combines that, when you look at the planting lines of the harvesting of cereal crops in Alberta, are using GPS and so forth. They're like a satellite. Perfect lines. Then some of them don't even have a driver as well, right?

I mean, but inside of that machine, you know, is a complicated computer system that you're not even allowed to open, right? If you do, you're breaking your contract. I'm wondering if you guys have a plan on how you're going to deal with that. John Deere: they're formidable. It's a pretty big operation. May well just say: oh, yeah, you go ahead and try fixing your own combine. They won't want you to do that. Always when you make legislation, you make sure that you can follow up with it. It's not just written on paper; it's something you can actually execute. And people go: "Yeah. Thanks, government, for letting me do that."

I mean, I know that there are some industries – I can't remember. I heard on the radio recently that there's a tractor manufacturer here in Alberta that's specifically building a tractor that you can fix, right? It's been modelled after sort of that late 1970s Case tractor or Massey Ferguson tractor that you can open up and fix because it has the same technology as it had 50 years ago. A lot of people like that because you can save money. I think the only modern feature this manufacturer put in was a backup camera, but otherwise it looked like something my grandfather would drive and that I would drive as well as a kid. Those are awesome tractors to have around the farmyard. Making sure we can actually execute these things that we're promising in this bill I think is very important.

The other question I have is in regard to credit protection. We know that fraud is a very widespread problem not just in Alberta but Canada and around the world; 1 in 4 Canadians in a recent poll

said that they have been victims of fraud or extortion and credit card and bank fraud. We're using mostly not cash, right? There's just a lot. You're buying things online and so forth. There's just so much opportunity to experience fraud. I'm just wondering what the actual nuts and bolts are that are being proposed in this bill. How can we get protections from fraud, let's say credit card fraud, immediately once we pass this bill? I would be curious to know that.

Another one. I mean, these are all things that other jurisdictions are doing, you know, to some degree, so you can always look at best practices and copy best practices. The whole idea about ticket resales is a huge scourge on the entertainment industry and the sporting industry, which I guess is kind of the same thing. Because ticket resales happen across jurisdictions, I think it's important that you model your provincial legislation on things that you can chase down to other jurisdictions, right?

Like, if you're buying tickets for a concert or something like that, you're not buying them necessarily from another Edmontonian or another Albertan. That could be coming from anywhere, right? So you have to build in your legislation some uniformity of how other jurisdictions have been pursuing this already so that you can try to reduce those incidents of scalping, which is what it is. These guys buy tickets, and then they resell them at an extortionate rate. I think the province of Ontario has made a lot of noise about that. I think that would be a good place for us to see: how successful was that? Was it just talk or was it substantive? I think all Albertans would benefit from that as well.

The third part that I just wanted to talk about very briefly is – what do you call it now? – this lemon law. Okay. It sounds good. I like lemons but not when they're cars and not when, you know, you're being ripped off and somebody's selling you something that's not just planned obsolescence but defective material. Again, I mean, this has been as long as people have been building things, that there is not just planned obsolescence but actually defective materials. For us to protect Albertans from that I think is a great idea. Cars are so much more expensive now, and used cars are selling at a premium. I'm not entirely sure why, but, you know, it really does expose probably the second-biggest purchase that we make – right? – as a consumer from some version of fraud or defective manufacturing or somebody selling a used car that they're not advertising what they're actually selling you.

5:50

Those are my main concerns and questions I have for the minister and the government around consumer protection, around, you know, the right to repair and credit card fraud and ticket fraud; what specific measures we would take to institute this bill, which I kind of like, actually. It kind of feels like something we saw before in our caucus. We did debate it, but there it is. It came back. It's like reincarnation. Happy to support it.

Thanks.

The Speaker: Are there any other speakers?

Seeing none, would the mover of second reading like to close debate? Not seeing anybody.

[Motion carried; Bill 34 read a second time]

Mr. Williams: Well, with nine minutes to spare, Mr. Speaker, I think it's time that we adjourn for the evening and go visit our municipalities at RMA. I move that the Assembly be adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:52 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:
Editor
Alberta Hansard
3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St
EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7
Telephone: 780.427.1875
E-mail: AlbertaHansard@assembly.ab.ca

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