

Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, November 4, 2026

Day 65

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 31st Legislature
Second Session

McIver, Hon. Ric, ECA, Calgary-Hays (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

Al-Guneid, Nagwan, Calgary-Glenmore (NDP)
Amery, Hon. Mickey K., ECA, KC, Calgary-Cross (UC), Deputy Government House Leader
Arcand-Paul, Brooks, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
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)
Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP), Official Opposition Deputy Assistant Whip
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Hon. Devin, ECA, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Dyck, Nolan B., Grande Prairie (UC)
Eggen, Hon. David, ECA, Edmonton-North West (NDP)
Ellingson, Court, Calgary-Foothills (NDP)
Ellis, Hon. Mike, ECA, Calgary-West (UC), Deputy Premier
Elmeligi, Sarah, Banff-Kananaskis (NDP)
Eremenko, Janet, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, ECA, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., ECA, Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Glubish, Hon. Nate, ECA, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gray, Hon. Christina, ECA, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP), Official Opposition House Leader
Guthrie, Hon. Peter F., ECA, Airdrie-Cochrane (PTP)
Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Hayter, Julia K.U., Calgary-Edgemont (NDP)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, ECA, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
Horner, Hon. Nate S., ECA, Drumheller-Stettler (UC)
Hoyle, Rhiannon, Edmonton-South (NDP)
Hunter, Hon. Grant R., ECA, Taber-Warner (UC)
Ip, Nathan, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP), Official Opposition Assistant Whip
Jean, Hon. Brian Michael, ECA, KC, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche (UC)
Johnson, Jennifer, Lacombe-Ponoka (UC)
Jones, Hon. Matt, ECA, Calgary-South East (UC)
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Kayande, Samir, Calgary-Elbow (NDP)
LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, ECA, Red Deer-North (UC)
Loewen, Hon. Todd, ECA, Central Peace-Notley (UC)
Long, Hon. Martin M., ECA, West Yellowhead (UC)
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Lunty, Brandon G., Leduc-Beaumont (UC) Government Whip
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Nicolaides, Hon. Demetrios, ECA, Calgary-Bow (UC)
Nixon, Hon. Jason, ECA, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (UC)
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP), Official Opposition Whip
Petrovic, Chelsae, Livingstone-Macleod (UC)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, ECA, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP), Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
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Sawyer, Hon. Tara, ECA, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC)
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Schow, Hon. Joseph R., ECA, Cardston-Siksika (UC), Government House Leader
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP), Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, ECA, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, Hon. R.J., ECA, Highwood (UC)
Sinclair, Scott, Lesser Slave Lake (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Hon. Danielle, ECA, Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC), Premier
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Wright, Hon. Justin, ECA, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UC)
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Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC), Deputy Government Whip
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland

Party standings:
United Conservative: 46 New Democrat: 39 Progressive Tory: 1 Vacant: 1

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Al-Guneid
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Calahoo Stonehouse
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Ip
Petrovic
Rowswell
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m. Wednesday, November 4, 2026

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, in my gallery today I have former MLA Graham Sucha, who completed his degree in political science and government at Carleton University and holds a diploma in radio and television broadcasting technology. He proudly served the constituency of Calgary-Shaw from 2015 to '19 and now works as the executive director for the Graduate Students' Association at the University of Calgary. He is joined by his son Alex Sucha, who is following in his father's footsteps and studying political science. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The hon. Rick Fraser is also in my gallery today. He was the MLA for Calgary-South East from 2012 to 2019 and served as an associate minister of public safety, associate minister of recovery and reconstruction of High River, and deputy government whip. Mr. Fraser continues to serve the people of Alberta as an occupational health and safety advanced care paramedic. Please rise and accept the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, Bill Bewick is also seated in my gallery today. He's accompanied by his daughter, who is joining us for bring your kid to work day to get a glimpse of what her dad does. Emily is in grade 9. She enjoys playing volleyball and is an avid soccer player, and I hope she enjoys getting to experience question period today. Please rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Hon. members, I am honoured to welcome family members of former Legislative Assembly Office colleague Janet Schwegel, whose recent passing has been deeply felt by many within this Assembly and across the Legislative Assembly Office. Joining us today are Janet's husband, Bryan Larocque; her daughter Allison Larocque; Allison's husband, Jacob Stephens; and Janet's brother Harold Schwegel. We are also joined by Legislative Assembly Office colleagues who worked closely with Janet and witnessed first-hand her dedication to this very institution, Amanda LeBlanc, managing editor of *Hansard* and manager of venue services, and Erin Camponi, manager of visitor services. I would ask all of our guests to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

School groups today, members. First up we have the hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you a wonderful batch of students from Ashmont elementary school from the St. Paul county. Thank you to the teachers for all the hard work you put in to prepare them for a successful future. I ask you to please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce the grade 9 students and staff from the St. Thomas Aquinas school in Provost. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise today and introduce through you and to you to the members of the Assembly the brilliant students from Terrace Ridge school in Lacombe. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Other guests today, starting with Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise as a proud dad because today is take your kid to work day, and I'm incredibly proud to have my daughter Sloane, her friend Maggie Gibbs, my niece Breeley Gramlich, and my brother Shawn, their chaperone. My daughter is beautiful, smart, and punctual, so obviously she gets it from her mom, but at least she's funny and she has my name. I ask them to please rise and accept the warm reception of this Legislature.

Thank you.

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce through you and to all members of this Assembly constituents of Edmonton-South West, the Lee-Wing family, Andrea and her son Noah, who I understand is very interested in the political process. I ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you my office manager, Sunny Johal, and my second-year social work student, Ava Hendricksen, who joined us this morning for the remembrance ceremony. I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Chestermere-Strathmore.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise and introduce someone very special to me seated in the Speaker's gallery, the man who taught me the value of hard work, how to drive a 1950s tractor, and so much more, my father. He's also been officially dubbed the tractor whisperer by the former Speaker. He's here for his very first question period, so we'll all be super behaved. He's celebrating his 61st birthday. I ask that he rise and receive the warm welcome.

The Speaker: Tractor whisperer. That's high praise.

The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce Carla Jones, who works in my department as director of communications, and her daughter Isla. Isla is in grade 9 and is joining us as part of New Horizons School's take your kid to work day. Today she'll be seeing what keeps her mom busy and learning more about government. I ask them both to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Ms Fir: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my two favourite Calgary-Peigan constituents, Mara and Kaja. Mara has the biggest heart and is

so thoughtful, and Kaja is spirited and full of personality. Girls like Mara and Kaja give me so much hope for the future of our province. I'm grateful to be a part of their lives and excited to see the remarkable young women they become. I invite them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to welcome the best deputy minister in the public service, Brandy Cox, her daughter McKenna Ferguson, and McKenna's friend Melanie Usatov to take your kid to work day. McKenna and Melanie are grade 9 students at New Horizons charter school, and they have a passion for figure skating. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to rise and introduce to everyone Andrew Traynor and Simon Koots, two of the hard-working caucus team. They've been supporting our work on the Select Special Committee on Electoral Boundaries, and I'd like them and all Albertans to know that the value of a motion should be measured in its quality and not if it passes or not. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

Mr. Boitchenko: Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you to all the members of this Assembly Lisa Hardy, executive director of Pickleball Alberta. Pickleball is the fastest growing sport in North America, and Lisa is doing a great job promoting it in our province. Can you please stand up and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Lunty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce director Lally Naugaza and the team from True Flash Production, an Alberta-based filmmaking team whose latest movie was filmed in our province and is gaining international recognition. I ask them to rise and please receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: We have a member's statement, but the Opposition House Leader has risen.

Ms Gray: I would like to request unanimous consent to continue with introductions as I am aware that with the Remembrance Day ceremony and the number of guests not all introductions were completed. I leave that request with the government.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce Lisa Perkins and Michelle Baer, both residents of Red Deer-South, proud Canadians. Michelle is actually our nominated candidate for the next provincial election. Please rise and receive our warm welcome.

Members' Statements

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

Former Director of Parliamentary Programs Janet Schwegel March 24, 1959, to October 26, 2026

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to pay tribute to Janet Schwegel, whose contributions to this Assembly span decades and whose impact continues to be felt throughout this institution. Last week we were saddened to learn of Janet's passing.

Janet's connection to the Legislative Assembly Office stretched back to the 1980s when she first joined the LAO as an input editor. She returned to *Hansard* in 2003 and went on to hold a series of increasingly senior roles, including editorial assistant, managing editor of *Hansard*, which later expanded to include manager of venue services and director of parliamentary programs. Janet also served in this Chamber as a table officer from 2019 until she retired in 2024, but her dedication remained evident as she continued supporting *Hansard* until just earlier this year.

Throughout her career Janet earned a reputation for excellence and a willingness to take on complex challenges. Colleagues consistently recognized her leadership, professionalism, and commitment to public service. She helped guide the Assembly through periods of significant change, championed new technologies, and worked continuously to improve the services that support members in the parliamentary process.

But Janet's legacy extends far beyond the positions that she held. Those who knew her remember a person of warmth and determination. Whether she was mentoring colleagues, chasing new adventures, travelling the world with her husband, Bryan, or speaking very proudly about her daughter Allison, she approached life with energy and purpose.

Mr. Speaker, institutions like this are shaped by people who quietly make them stronger through their dedication and service to others. Janet was one of those people. Her contributions will continue to be reflected in the work conducted here for years to come. On behalf of all members I extend our sincere condolences to her family, friends, and former colleagues. [Standing ovation]

Electoral Boundaries Committee Report

Ms Ganley: It's supposed to be about the voters, the people who represent us, the ones who sent us here. It's supposed to be about their rights. Every eight years we redraw the electoral maps to ensure equal representation. Sounds boring, right? Normally it is, but for the first time in Alberta the UCP threw out the independent maps.

The Premier and her ministers claimed repeatedly that they were just wanting to bring back two rural seats. That sure isn't what we got, though. The Premier's chief of staff claims that this was to "level the playing field." That's simply not true. In 2023 the UCP received 56 per cent of the seats with 52 per cent of the votes.

But that's not the point either. The point is the voters, voters that are supposed to pick their politicians. The maps of the majority tell a story. They carved up Lethbridge into four ridings to insert a third rural seat. The panel report calls the people of Lethbridge "population to spare." It talks about achieving this map by "borrowing" that population. These are people. They are not to be used so the two UCP cabinet ministers don't have to compete for a seat. Public submissions pleading to keep Lethbridge as two seats outnumber this pizza slicing 5 to 1, but the UCP don't care.

In Calgary, the gerrymandered maps removed Springbank from Cochrane, a constituency that was already below average population, and splits it into two ridings currently held by two UCP cabinet ministers, using these people who have chosen to live outside Calgary to shore up urban seats. Their justification? Golf courses.

This is supposed to be about the voters, but like so many things, somewhere along the line the UCP seemed to have lost track of them. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

2026 Harvest

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta agriculture is much more than just premium Alberta beef. Field crop production

also plays an important role in the industry. The 2026 crop report is in, and as of last week 94 per cent of major crops have been harvested. Crop yields were up 21 per cent from the five-year average and nearly 11 per cent from the 10-year average. Southern Alberta flourished with yields 60 per cent above the five-year average, with only the northwest region recording below-average yields, down 9.5 per cent.

Yes, this year we have seen record rainfalls across our great province, which has caused strong yields for some but many hardships for others in the farming community. In my riding, Athabasca, Westlock, St. Paul, Smoky Lake, and Thorhild counties all declared agricultural states of emergency, and I heard many concerns from fellow farmers in the area. Now, this is not the first year that farmers have dealt with adverse weather, and it certainly won't be the last.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot control the weather, but we can ensure Alberta farmers have the support they need to succeed. From crop insurance and affordable financing through Agriculture Financial Services Corporation to fuel tax relief that lowers operating costs, our government is standing with producers. We are investing in irrigation infrastructure and producer-led agricultural research as well as providing incentives that expand value-added processing, all while creating new markets for Alberta-grown products. These supports help farmers manage risk, strengthen their operations, and prepare for the next growing season, which will hopefully be more predictable than this year.

In Alberta we remain an agricultural leader, the best province to farm, and a proud producer of quality food that feeds families locally at home and around the world. And remember: if you ate today, thank a farmer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Domestic Violence Prevention

Ms Hayter: Every Albertan deserves to feel safe, supported, and cared for at home. Yet for far too many home is not a place of safety. Alberta has one of the highest rates of self-reported spousal violence in Canada. Family violence is preventable, but it requires all of us to recognize the warning signs, challenge harmful behaviour, and ensure that people know where to turn for help.

For those experiencing violence, leaving is often the most dangerous and difficult step. It means you can walk away from your home, your income, your community, and the life that you have worked to build. It costs a lot to leave, but it costs everything to stay. Rebuilding after violence requires courage. Too often the burden of family violence falls disproportionately on women, who must navigate these challenges while working to keep themselves and sometimes their children safe.

That is why preventing family violence and supporting survivors demands more than an emergency response. For people to leave unsafe situations and build stable, independent lives, survivors need affordable homes, a living wage, accessible public health care, and affordable child care. There is an incredible impact that front-line organizations and shelters can make when they are funded and equipped to meet the needs of Albertans anywhere in our province. This month we honour the resilience of survivors, support the work on the front lines, and commit ourselves to build a province where everyone can live free of violence.

The Alberta NDP will continue to advocate for survivors and for the supports that help Albertans find safety, stability, and hope. If you or someone you know are currently experiencing a violent situation at home, please contact a family violence information line in your city and find a domestic violence shelter near you. There is help available 24 hours a day.

1:50

Government Accountability

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, holding public office comes with responsibility. It requires judgment, integrity, and the courage to question decisions that we know are wrong. In this government we've seen a disturbing pattern: procedures replaced by directives, ministers follow orders, questions go unasked, and accountability evaporates. We've seen the repercussions: the Tylenol deal, surgical facilities, recovery centres, charter schools handed to insiders, postsecondary funding awarded without performance metrics. And when the concerns are raised, our so-called leaders use the same defence: show me the evidence, and I'll act. Even with a confirmed RCMP investigation, search warrants executed, four court cases, hearing evidence, leadership turns a blind eye.

Mr. Speaker, fiduciary duty is an obligation to act faithfully, responsibly, and in the best interests of those we serve. For a minister ignorance cannot be used as a shield when warning signs are all around you. Think about the getaway driver in a robbery. The driver never entered the bank, but he knows what is happening and helped those responsible escape the consequences.

Public office demands a higher standard. Integrity means standing up for what is right when doing so carries a cost. It means respecting the rule of law and accepting responsibility. It means living by the same principles you preach to your constituents, your friends, and your family. Character is not a costume we put on when it's convenient. Good representation requires courage, courage to question, to say no, and, when necessary, to stand alone. We are not elected to protect those in power; we are elected to protect the public interest.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

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

Electoral Boundaries Committee Report

Mr. Nenshi: Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of lessons to be taken from the U.S. mid-term election results last night. The first is that the Republican-style gerrymandering that this government is so fond of doesn't always work. You'll recall the Republicans attempted to build a congressional majority across multiple states, but they lost gerrymandered seats last night in Florida, North Carolina, Alabama, and Ohio. Failed spectacularly. Do these results give the Premier any pause that perhaps gerrymandering isn't the best way to try to rig an election?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are indeed a lot of lessons to be learned from the election results last night. It is a vindication of our approach when it comes to tariffs. We have always objected to tariffs. We know it hurts us. It hurts the Americans. It also is a vindication of our approach when it comes to reaching across the aisle. We hosted California Senator Adam Schiff here, to be talking about ways in which we can expand our relationship in the United States. He was grateful that we continue to keep California wines on the shelf. We're going to be able to use that relationship, I think, hopefully to be able to get a better and stronger relationship with the United States. Now we have an opportunity to do that.

Mr. Nenshi: Interesting. I recall that when President Trump was re-elected, the Government House Leader did a happy dance here in the Legislature. It was something to see. The Premier herself jetted off to Mar-a-Lago. She went to Trump's inauguration, theoretically met with

people, none of whom remember meeting with her, and now suddenly she's a Democrat. She's reaching across the aisle. You know, Don Braid today wrote, "Trust in the [electoral boundaries] process is dead and buried." I believe that government needs to earn the trust of people, and this disingenuousness does not do that. Does the Premier ever worry about losing the trust of the public?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's talk about being disingenuous. If his conspiracy theory is that someone gerrymandered the advisory panel's maps to benefit the UCP, then they failed miserably. Under the proposed maps if the UCP were to win the popular vote by the same margins as we did in 2023, nine points in total, the NDP would gain three seats and the UCP would gain one. He's being ridiculous. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Nenshi: Actually, the polls say we would win a majority election either way, but somebody has to stand up for democracy, and the Premier's answer there was really telling. She actually only cares about the electoral results from a gerrymandered map. I've asked her several times about Lethbridge; I've received no answer. The report itself doesn't try to justify why to change Lethbridge. It simply says there are reasons to do it, including if you live near the rodeo grounds, you're actually a rancher. This doesn't work. So what is the actual justification for wiping the third-largest city in Alberta off the map?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, another result we can get from last night is that election denialism also has an impact on voter results, and this is what this member is trying to do. He's trying to set it up so that people will doubt the integrity of elections, and he should stop doing that. Why would we restore two rural districts? Because we don't want to deprive rural Alberta from effective representation. If you want to have a look at the weird map that was drawn by Notley, just look at Cardston-Siksika. If you turn it to the side, it kind of looks like Daffy Duck. No wonder it stuck out. The commission looked at it, and they decided to give Lethbridge four seats, and that's what we're going to be debating in this Legislature. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

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

Affordability Measures

Mr. Nenshi: The most telling thing the Premier has ever done: drawn by Notley. Of course, it was an independent commission. Maybe that's what the Premier has misunderstood this entire time, thinking she can draw the maps herself.

But there's another lesson from last night. Remember James Carville, 35 years ago? "It's the economy, stupid." Well, it's the same thing here in Alberta. This government has rejected every single affordability measure that the NDP has put forward. The Premier now admits she's had all the wrong priorities. So what's your plan on affordability?

The Speaker: For the folks at home, nobody just got called stupid. The hon. leader was quoting somebody from the past.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, we started by balancing the budget, six consecutive budget surpluses. We paid down $15 billion worth of NDP debt. We doubled the size of the heritage savings trust fund. We've created 305,000 jobs since October 2022 because when people have good-paying jobs, it allows them to be able to buy a house. It allows them to be able to get on with an independent life. That's our promise to our young people. We addressed the issue of utilities, which he did not do when he was mayor of Calgary and managing Enmax. We brought through child care subsidies, and we also have 25 per cent discounts for seniors.

Mr. Nenshi: And, yes, unemployment is the highest outside of Atlantic Canada. Youth unemployment is the highest it's ever been. Inflation in Alberta is the highest in the country, and 1 in 3 families in Calgary don't have enough to eat every single month. Grocery prices are out of control, but there are real things that can be done, from encouraging competition to instituting a watchdog. The government has said no to every single one of these things. Apparently, there was a meeting once with the grocery barons, but nothing came of it. So what is their plan to bring down grocery prices?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I did meet with a representative from Loblaws, who's bringing the approach that's been very effective in Europe. What he's found is that these pocket stores, that allow for a small number of essentials, are allowing them to reduce the cost by about 35 per cent. Then on top of that, the no name brand, if you opt for that, also reduces by 35 per cent. They have had seven of these grocery stores that have been rolled out. They want to roll more of them out in Alberta, and we're working with them to see if there are other ways that we'd be able to expand that kind of approach so that we can make groceries affordable.

Mr. Schmidt: The only pockets you guys are concerned about are your own.

The Speaker: I won't take that 5 seconds away from you, even though you – go ahead, hon. leader.

Mr. Nenshi: Yet none of these stores have opened, and grocery prices remain out of control. The Premier could easily have had a meeting with Galen Weston herself, as Premier Ford has done. She could have called him to a legislative committee with other grocery barons to explain why they have record profits while families are paying more, but she didn't. She's been too busy palling around with separatists. She's now the least trusted and least popular politician in Alberta; yet another poll today says that. What is the next idea in our affordability agenda that the Premier plans on trying?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I did meet with Per Bank, who is the architect of this approach in Europe, and he did share with me that he's rolling it out in Alberta and intends to roll out more of them. Albertans should be looking for these kinds of approaches where it's a smaller store so that they have lower overhead. It allows them to pick up their essentials. Then if they want to go to a grocery store to get the full service, they have that option as well.

Youth unemployment, Mr. Speaker: they have nothing to talk about on that. When they increased the minimum wage from $10 an hour to $15 an hour, it resulted in 30,000 job losses from 15- to 24-year-olds. We're not going to take advice from them, Mr. Speaker. [interjection]

2:00

The Speaker: It's your leader's turn, so we're just waiting for quiet so we can do that.

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

Mr. Nenshi: Well, I'm glad that the Premier learned something on one of her jet-setting vacations in Europe, but nothing has happened for everyday Albertans.

Bill 38

Mr. Nenshi: Now, the last message that we had from last night is that MAGA is dead. Americans, like Albertans, are tired of meaningless culture wars. They want a government that's actually interested in governing. Yet at a time when we need to invest in our postsecondary system after years of UCP cuts, we get a bill that claims to be about institutional neutrality. Who exactly asked the Premier for this, and what difference is it going to make to a single student?

Ms Smith: You know what, Mr. Speaker? They engage in the culture war. They bring in the wokeism and the cancel culture, they create a hostile environment for free speech, and when we say we'd like to undo all that terrible policy and go back to neutrality and focus on academic excellence and make sure that students have an opportunity to have free expression on campus, they call that a culture war. No, no, no. We're undoing their culture war and their bad policies.

Mr. Nenshi: And that, Mr. Speaker, is all she's got. She bans books and blames it on other people.

At the end of the day the first role of government should be to ease people's worries, to ease their minds, not worry about what group the government is going to attack next. What is this Bill 38 even about? It might be about Palestinian protests. It might be about residential school denialism. Who knows? The Mintz report's first and major recommendation was significant additional funding to create 43,000 new seats. How does this bill take any steps to getting us there?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll tell him what this bill is about. Postsecondary institutions should remain places for a free exchange of ideas. That is what our universities are for. Students should be able to debate ideas freely on campus without government or institutional interference in lawful expression. Students deserve to have fair and consistent conduct processes at a postsecondary institution. This is what people expect their postsecondaries to operate like. They haven't for a long time, and we're getting back to it. [interjections]

The Speaker: Well, we're getting a lot of help today from people that aren't recognized to speak.

Mr. Nenshi: Clearly the Premier didn't get the memo, not even from J.D. Vance. MAGA is dead.

I'm reminded that last spring Statistics Canada found that Albertans reported the lowest quality of life satisfaction in the entire country. This is not normal; this is not Albertan. The Premier had all summer to act on it, to actually improve people's lives. Instead, she traded on anger, division, and hatred, and it worked. People are really angry; they're just angry at her. So how does all this culture war garbage, even today, make anybody's life better?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, wokeism is dead in Alberta. Cancel culture is dead in Alberta. We don't want to have university students have to show an equity card to be able to stand up and speak at speaker's corner like they have to at an NDP convention.

I'll tell you what we spent the last year doing. We spent the last year getting approval for the prairie link pipeline, which is going to deliver a million barrels a day of additional crude to our friends and allies in Asia, add $20 billion to the GDP, create tens of thousands of new jobs, and create billions of dollars to be able to support health care and education. That's what people want to see.

Government Priorities

Ms Pancholi: Alberta's big cities have sent the UCP a strong message. Edmonton voted no to the nine, and Calgary voted no to eight of the nine UCP referendum questions. The cities where schools are the most crowded and where hospitals have been cancelled know who's responsible. It's not their neighbours; it's the UCP. Results are especially uncomfortable for six Calgary cabinet members whose ridings voted against almost all of the questions. Will the Minister of Justice or Indigenous Relations or public safety or education or Advanced Education or multiculturalism have the courage to stand up and tell their constituents they'll respect their votes over the Premier's out-of-touch agenda?

The Speaker: Order. Order. The hon. government . . . [interjections] Order.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question coming from the member opposite with regard to the referendum, something that they have called right from the beginning a sham, and the unfortunate part is that's their only word to use when referring to consultation. It is our job as the government of Alberta to put forth questions to better understand the will of the people that we serve, the will of the people that elected us. While the Premier spent the summer touring this province from every corner listening to Albertans, the Leader of the Opposition called it, again, a sham. It's dreadful to think of how he would be if he was ever Premier, heaven forbid. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order on both sides.

Ms Pancholi: Well, it's clear the UCP knows that they've lost the confidence of urban Albertans. They keep having to put up rural ministers to answer for their Calgary MLAs. They can't speak for themselves or their constituents. The UCP has no representation in Edmonton, and none of their handful of Calgary MLAs is willing to risk their spot in cabinet to actually reflect the views of Calgarians. Rather than listening to the 2.5 million voters in our two largest cities, the UCP chose to water down their voices more by blending them into rural ridings. If the UCP truly cares this little about the voices of urban Albertans, why don't they just say so?

The Speaker: Order. Order. I keep getting forced to cut you off, but I'm hoping not to have to do that again.

Go ahead.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is rich to hear members of the opposition talk about rural Alberta as if they actually understand rural Alberta. I would say to the member opposite that her logic and the evidence are clearly seeing other people. I can tell you that on this side of the House we recognize the importance of not deleting rural constituencies. Those constituencies and the people who live there deserve a voice. Whether you're in northern Alberta producing world-class energy products that support the rest of the province and the rest of the country and ship out to the rest of the world or you're in southern Alberta producing ag products, every one of those industries and all those constituencies deserve a voice, and I'm glad the report reflects that.

Ms Pancholi: For almost 4 years the UCP has been slavishly following Donald Trump's playbook: anti-immigrant rhetoric and obsessive focus on culture war issues over kitchen-table priorities, dismissing the needs of growing cities, gerrymandering, and, most importantly, ignoring the affordability crisis that voters are experiencing every single day. Well, last night the people of the United States overwhelmingly and historically rejected the MAGA playbook. They sent the message

that a government that is out of touch with the people will face the music. To the Premier. A blue wave crushed her mentor last night. Is she ready for the orange wave that's ready to crush the UCP?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, the NDP seem to be fixated on the United States and the results there. We're fixated on what's most important to Albertans. If the NDP are so interested in what's happening across the border, they are welcome to move there and live there, if they're so happy with the results.

On this side of the House I can tell you that we're going to continue to do what is best for Albertans, which is keep their taxes low, like cutting the gas tax, and keep investment coming here, which creates jobs in the private sector, something the NDP couldn't even fathom. Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we know what Albertans want, and we're going to answer the call.

Online Gaming Regulation

Member Gurinder Brar: What happens in Vegas doesn't always stay in Vegas, and this time it didn't. While our economy is under attack from Donald Trump's trade war and punishing tariffs, the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction was jet-setting to Las Vegas, to Sin City to research what appears to be the major priority for this government, online gambling. Can the minister explain how sports betting and iGaming will help Albertans struggling to put food on their table?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister for service Alberta.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the first question in three years. Now, it's not a secret that online gambling has been alive and well in Alberta for almost 30 years, and there are, quite frankly, some repugnant operators. Well, we decided to clean it up, and we have now come up with a legal, regulated format for online gambling where not only do they have to not target young people or vulnerable Albertans, but in addition to that, for the first time ever we're making operators pay for the treatment. Albertans asked for this, and we were happy to do it.

Member Gurinder Brar: Given that Albertan workers are suffering from Donald Trump's tariffs and given that this minister already flip-flopped on keeping American booze off the shelves, folding like a paper tiger, and given that most hard-working Albertans don't get their employers to pay for a four-day gambling conference on the Las Vegas strip, why is increasing American access to our regulated gaming industry worth the minister's taxpayer-funded travel?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, as we've said on this side of the House before, we can keep explaining it to them, but we just can't make them understand it. But I'll try. You know, we had a very repugnant online gambling market that was actually targeting vulnerable Albertans, so we cleaned it up. We came up with a legal, regulated format where you can't target vulnerable Albertans, you can't target young people. We know the best way to shut down the black market. That's to have a healthy, regulated market, and that's what we've done in Alberta.

Member Gurinder Brar: Given that Albertans are swamped with ads for sports betting and gambling, raising addiction concerns as Albertans lost $1.5 million a day gambling – cellphones, billboards, bus stops; the ads are everywhere – and given that this government has crushed Calgary family finances in massive property tax increases and sky-high grocery prices, how does the minister expect that gambling losses are going to make life affordable for those families?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, it sounds like he lost money on the Oilers last night.

You know, we had a great news announcement today. We announced that we were using some of the proceeds from online gambling to give to rural charities, and we did that because there is a huge disparity between the urban and the rural charitable casinos, and we were more than happy to top that up, Mr. Speaker.

Look, when it comes to online gambling, my advice to anyone is: if you don't gamble now, please don't start. But, Mr. Speaker, if you are going to place a sports bet, do it in a legal, regulated format. It's much safer.

The Speaker: The next question belongs to Chestermere-Strathmore.

Bill 33

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As artificial intelligence tools become more accessible, Albertans are increasingly concerned about how easily intimate content can be fabricated or altered and shared without consent. When Alberta's intimate images legislation was enacted in 2017, it was not designed to address deepfakes or digitally altered content, leaving victims without clear recourse. Can the minister of technology explain why the government is amending this legislation and how these changes will protect Albertans from emerging harms?

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

Mr. Glubish: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for this important question. In 2017 the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul brought forward the Protecting Victims of Non-consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act, and it was a significant step that gave victims real tools to defend themselves and fight back when their privacy has been violated. Today we are building on that work to protect women and girls who are disproportionately targeted by this kind of abuse. With today's technology a person's likeness can be turned into fake intimate content in seconds. The harm to their privacy, safety, and well-being is real. Whether content is authentic or altered, sharing it without consent is wrong, and we're proud to implement penalties on this.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that victims of nonconsensual distribution often face prolonged legal battles and the risk of being re-victimized in court and further given that once intimate content is shared online, it can be extraordinarily difficult to remove, can the minister inform the House of what tools and remedies these amendments will provide to help victims stop the harm and hold those responsible accountable?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Glubish: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Victims should not have to fight their way through court just to be taken seriously. Thanks to this legislation, they won't need to prove financial loss to bring a claim, and it will be up to the defendant to prove consent, not the victim. Courts will be able to order content removed, deleted, or deindexed, including by Internet intermediaries. For the most serious of cases we are creating a provincial offence, the first of its kind in Canada, with fines of up to $10,000 and up to two years in jail. Let's be clear. People who distribute or threaten to distribute any type of intimate content are despicable. They should never be allowed to get away with this.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his hard work on this very serious matter. Given that technology continues to evolve at a rapid pace, creating new ways for bad actors to cause harm online and further given that Albertans expect their laws to keep up with these changes and protect their privacy and safety, to that same minister: how will these amendments ensure Alberta's laws remain effective as technology changes, and what do they mean for everyday Albertans moving forward?

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, technology does move fast, and bad actors move fast with it. That's why these amendments are technology neutral. Whether content is created with today's technology or whatever technology comes down the road, the law that we are proposing will cover it, including audio, video, and images. What does this mean for Albertans? One very simple thing: you have the right to control your intimate content, and consent is paramount. Alberta's government is building the strongest privacy protections in Canada, and this legislation is another important step that helps to make sure our laws stay ahead of criminals.

Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction Minister's Travel to the U.S.

Ms Renaud: Mr. Speaker, in June 2025 as Trump's tariff war raged against Canada, the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction opened up Alberta to American booze while almost every other province kept it off the shelves. Then three months later he ran up a nearly $4,000 tab on Albertans' dime on a bourbon tour in Kentucky. How did the minister's expensive taste tests of Kentucky bourbon help Alberta families in Morinville-St. Albert?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, we have distilleries in this province that have won gold medals on the world stage, but unfortunately the best kept secret is how great our whisky is. It's true. We went to Kentucky to meet with their legislators. We met with some of their independent offices, and yes, we met with some of the distillers. We met with their associations. We wanted to use that information to help inform us of how we could brand Alberta whisky in the same way they branded Kentucky bourbon and the same way they branded Scotch. Business loves it, and it's working.

Ms Renaud: Given that the minister's expense records list the booze cruise as taxi fare – although what taxi company has a slogan that says, "You sip; we drive"? – and given that the actual receipt for thousands of public dollars went to a service calling itself Kentucky's premier private bourbon tour experience, will the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction apologize for this booze cruise and pay back all the money he spent?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is going to come as a shock to the NDP, but international missions are a core part of our job. Unlike the NDP, United Conservatives are focusing on growing Alberta's economy, and yes, that includes our distilleries. We have Albertans that have invested their life savings in some incredible distilleries. We're not ashamed to brag about it, and we're happy to do it.

Ms Renaud: He has big feelings.

Mr. Speaker, given that the minister told the *St. Albert Gazette* that most people on minimum wage are not the main wage earners in households and given that a minimum wage worker in Morinville-St. Albert would literally have to work for more than six weeks to pay off that bourbon tour tab and given that this was a chauffeured bourbon tasting booze cruise, not, as the minister claimed, a taxi ride, will the minister apologize and pay off your tab today? [interjections]

2:20

The Speaker: Are we about done?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, the only people in this Legislature who should be apologizing are the NDP to the 30,000 Albertans who lost their jobs when they jacked up the minimum wage, something the member just referenced. On this side of the House government members and private members spend time in foreign markets promoting and selling the importance of the Alberta advantage, and I can tell you, having done it myself, that the rest of the world knows where Alberta is. They know what we have to offer, and it's all because of the leadership of this Premier, who has made it clear that Alberta is open for business. Shame on them.

Food Prices and Affordability

Mr. Schmidt: In April the Premier said that the prices of eggs, ham, chicken, and milk were too high and that the minister of service Alberta was going to meet with grocery store owners and get them to bring down prices, but since April the costs of eggs, ham, chicken, and milk have all gone up. Did that meeting happen? If so, why did the minister fail to get grocery store owners to bring down the cost of groceries?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, I've got to tell you, that member stood up I think about a week ago and he was asking some questions about restrictive covenants. He actually said that an NDP government would bring in legislation to get rid of restrictive covenants. I thought I would use this opportunity to educate the individual so he doesn't waste any more time. Loblaws has already done it. Walmart has done it. Sobeys has done it. They've all gotten rid of restrictive covenants. Perhaps that individual should pick up a copy of the *Financial Post* or any other business magazine and learn something.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that there are more grocery stores than just Walmart, Loblaws, and Sobeys and given that since April the cost of sweet potatoes has gone up about $2 a pound, or 20 per cent, and given that the minister claims that bringing down grocery prices is his top priority but he spent less time meeting with grocery store giants than he did going to Kentucky on a booze cruise, will the minister apologize for failing to do anything to hold grocers accountable for their sky-high prices on food like sweet potatoes while he chose to go sip that sweet Kentucky bourbon?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, I know that that individual thinks he's being funny, but let me tell you about a small-business owner of a distillery that actually got their product into Costco because they promoted Alberta whisky, by the way, and he actually got the largest PO that his business had ever seen. Our approach is working, and we're not going to apologize for standing up for Albertans, for attracting investment, and creating more jobs. That's what we've been doing, and we're not going to stop now.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that since April the price of chicken drumsticks is up about $3 a pound, or 20 per cent, and the cost of a whole chicken is up $7 a pound, or more than 60 per cent, and given that these prices don't bother the minister, who refuses to apologize for failing to do his job while being comped in Vegas for a four-day meeting with online gambling stakeholders, why is making it easier for DraftKings to profit off same-game parlays a higher priority for this minister than making sure that families can afford to put chicken on the table?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, we know what the NDP platform is to help bring down the high cost of groceries. It's to eat the rich. They made it very clear at their last convention. In fact, if you follow Avi Lewis at all, you'll recall that they're calling for public grocery stores. Well, here's the interesting part: we already have public grocery stores. It's Co-op. The members should check it out. You know, it's funny. That caucus will not be happy until we have Soviet-style bread lines for all Albertans. That is not the approach that we're going to take. We will continue to fight for all Albertans.

The Speaker: The next question belongs to . . .

Mr. Schmidt: Kentucky bourbon makes you angry.

The Speaker: You just had a question. Maybe it's somebody else's turn. How would that be, right?

Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Schmidt: So angry.

The Speaker: No, no, sir. Hon. member, I'm trying to provide a little order so somebody can start a question. Please don't destroy that effort.

Lesser Slave Lake.

Northern Development

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's economy is booming, and to no surprise we are leading the country. In September alone our province added 23,000 jobs, and our unemployment rate fell below the national average. In Lesser Slave Lake that growth is reaching our mills, small businesses, and, of course, the oil patch, and every one of them needs skilled workers to keep up. Can the Minister of Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration explain how our government is making sure northern communities have the workers they need to keep this work and growth going?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that a strong Canada needs a strong Alberta, and a strong Alberta absolutely needs a strong northern Alberta. That is exactly why for 50 years the Alberta government has been helping northern communities to get the skilled workers they need through the northern Alberta development bursary program. This particular program provides $14,000 to students who commit to living in northern Alberta and working there. It's important that the north feels supported because they do so much for the rest of the province, and we have their back.

The Speaker: Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his response. Given that it's no wonder he's the JETI minister – clearly, the force is strong with him – and given that ATB Financial now forecasts our economy will grow 2.6 per cent this year, nearly three times the national rate and, if I were to be so bold, providing a new hope to the rest of the country, can we have a return of the JETI minister to please explain how the northern and regional economic development program will create good-paying jobs and attract new investment to northern Alberta and Lesser Slave Lake?

The Speaker: The Minister of Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is investing millions of dollars to create jobs and to grow communities in northern Alberta. This includes that last fiscal year we provided nearly $1.6 million to 13 projects in northern Alberta. This includes $47,000 to help grow the tourism sector in the Lesser Slave Lake region. We understand that the north is diverse and needs the support of Alberta. We know where the north is. The NDP couldn't even probably point it out on a map, honestly. They're so focused on Edmonton. I can tell you that on this side of the House the north is going to get the love.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Lesser Slave Lake has always been a strong contributor to the economy in this province and given that pipeline constraints under the former Trudeau government didn't just cost our economy billions a year – it was an attack on jobs and a way of life here in Alberta – further given that the new Pacific link pipeline will open an economic corridor, moving 1 million barrels a day to a new overseas market, can the Minister of Energy and Minerals please explain how this pipeline will bring economic investment and growth to areas like Lesser Slave Lake?

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

Mr. Jean: Thank you to the hard-working member, Mr. Speaker. It's true; the Pacific link will bring jobs, jobs, jobs right across Alberta, including in our north. The Clearwater play, which is partially in his riding, is a bigger play than all of Newfoundland put together. It's quite unusual and amazing. We are investing in job training. We're investing in opportunities and infrastructure. We're making sure that oil can flow safely, unlike the Leader of the Opposition that, quite frankly, didn't let water flow safely. If you can't trust them with water, you certainly can't trust them with oil.

Government Policies

Ms Hoffman: Last night Americans delivered a message to Donald Trump. They're sick and tired of the divisive MAGA politics, and they want politicians who are focused on affordability, fairness, and strong public services. Albertans feel the same way, Mr. Speaker. Calgary rejected the nine ridiculous referendum questions, with supposedly safe UCP ridings shooting down the schemes to restrict access to health care, undermine our Constitution, and politicize the courts. To the Minister of Justice. Calgary-Cross voted against eight of the nine referendum questions. Is it government policy to ignore the will of the Justice minister's own constituents?

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We've said time and again, both in this Assembly and to all Albertans, that we believe in the citizen initiative process, and we believe in the referendum process. It gives us an opportunity to hear directly from Albertans and seek guidance from Albertans. Albertans spoke loud and clear. We respect the results of the referendum. We most certainly are committed to a strong Alberta within a united Canada. We lead the way in so many ways, and we'll continue to do that.

Ms Hoffman: Given that Albertans have passed a verdict on the Justice minister's plan to pack the courts and given that the Justice minister's own riding voted against his referendum to politicize the judicial system by a nearly 2 to 1 margin and given that every neighbourhood in Calgary-Cross refused to let him and the Premier pick who served on the bench, did the Justice minister speak up on behalf of his constituents while these questions were being written in cabinet, or did he fail to represent his constituents?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What we've said time and again is that we want collaboration and co-operation in the process of selecting our individuals who serve on the bench. I'm pleased to report to all members of the Assembly and perhaps that member who does not quite know that the federal government has been working very collaboratively and very co-operatively with this government, with my ministry in the selection of judges and the work that we do, and we're very pleased to see that.

Ms Hoffman: Given that the question was about changing the process so the Premier and Justice minister could pack the courts and given that Calgary-Cross voted down the UCP's separatist agenda and given that Calgary has said loud and clear that they're not buying what the Premier and this minister are selling and given that the UCP gerrymandering electoral boundaries is an attempt to save rural cabinet ministers' seats, does the Justice minister know why it's government policy to rig maps for rural cabinet ministers, but they seem to have written off his in Calgary?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll try to explain it once again to that member and to all members of the NDP. The process for the drawing of maps happens every eight to 10 years by an independent commission. That happened this time around as well, just like it happens every time. It takes into account effective representation, it takes into account population growth, and it takes into account making sure that MLAs can serve the needs of their constituents. We have a report tabled before the Assembly. We'll engage in robust debate – I am sure about that – and we'll let the Assembly decide what happens next.

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

Addiction, Mental Health, and Homeless Supports

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Calgary concerns have been raised about homelessness, public drug use, and reports of illegal activity along 17th Avenue S.E. between Deerfoot Trail and 84th Street. Residents feel unsafe taking transit or stopping at their business while walking through these areas. To the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction: what is our government doing to address public drug use and connect people struggling with addiction to treatment and recovery?

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

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The impacts of addiction affect not only individuals but entire communities, and that's why our government continues to make significant investments in expanding addiction treatment capacity. There are more than 500 publicly funded detox pretreatment, treatment, and recovery beds available in Calgary alone. This includes two recovery communities which provide long-term addiction treatment at no cost, helping up to 600 people every year. We also continue working with local police services to ensure they have tools to connect people suffering from addiction and mental health challenges with the care they need. Recovery is possible.

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that recovery services can help address addiction and further given that people experiencing homelessness may also lack a stable place to live, to the same minister: how is our government helping people in Calgary move towards stable housing, access the social supports they need, and reduce the cycle of people repeatedly returning to crisis in public spaces over the long term?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the member. We're committed to supporting Albertans experiencing homelessness and making homelessness brief and nonrecurring. We know that many people experiencing homelessness are also struggling with existing mental health and addiction challenges. People experiencing homelessness require access to comprehensive health and social services and pathways to stability. We are strengthening wraparound supports across the province, especially in Calgary, and we are establishing the navigation and support centres in Edmonton and Calgary to connect Albertans to the critical services they need all under one roof.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that residents are seeing homelessness, public drug use, and disorder in the same public spaces and further given that the response involves more than one ministry, to the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction: how is our government working with other ministries and local partners to connect people with the right services, reduce repeated crises, and address neighbourhood safety concerns?

Mr. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, again thank you for the question. Albertans deserve to feel safe where they live, where they work, and local businesses should be able to operate very safely. We know police services see the impacts of addiction first-hand, and they are important partners to helping people get connected to recovery-oriented services. We continue working with local police services to ensure they have the tools that they need. For example, in Edmonton the new integrated stabilization centre provides a safe place for people who are publicly intoxicated to be brought by police to be medically assessed, receive care, and get connected to the treatment services they need. Recovery is possible.

AI Data Centre Projects

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, at a time when Canada's sovereignty is threatened, it's alarming that this government cribs its policy ideas from the Premier's mentor, Donald Trump. Given yesterday's historic rejection of Trump and MAGA politics, you would think they would have second thoughts. Americans rejected the President's wholehearted embrace of AI data centres when they don't meet the needs of local communities. Why isn't the government listening to Albertans' serious concerns about data centres in their backyards?

Mr. Glubish: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to inform the members opposite that we're not doing anything the way the Americans do it. We're doing it the Alberta way, and the Alberta way is the best. It's the best in North America. We have the highest standards for what responsible AI data centre development looks like. We saw the problems about some irresponsible developments done in the U.S., and we said: never here. We took the time over the last three years to carefully craft a regulatory framework that's clear, fair, and responsible, that protects the priorities of Albertans. I know the no-

development party over there doesn't understand that, but we over here do, and we're going to focus on making sure that it's done responsibly.

Mr. Ip: Given that this minister would rather help big tech companies run around the regulatory process than hold them accountable for the massive costs to Albertans that come with data centres and given that the deputy minister confirmed in Public Accounts yesterday that the ministry is not tracking jobs, water usage, or protecting Albertans from increasing energy costs, why should Albertans trust this government's uncritical, all-in approach to AI, that it will have any benefits for them?

Mr. Glubish: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that we have one example already with the data centre project by Meta in the Alberta Industrial Heartland that is creating 3,000 jobs right now; 3,000 families that are paying for their mortgages and food on the table. Does he want them all to go hungry and go out of work? I don't think that's the right choice. Now, Albertans are right to ask questions about: what does a responsibly developed project look like? We have asked those same questions, and we have taken that into account and developed a regulatory framework that is the gold standard in North America, and later this month we will be introducing more legislation to raise the bar even higher.

Mr. Ip: Given that this minister's AI policy suggests that he will believe anything tech billionaires tell him and given that when they UCP consulted, it is clear Albertans overwhelmingly disapprove of this government's approach to data centres and given the minister now says that they will introduce legislation to address gaps, why wasn't this done 24 months ago, before projects were approved? Who exactly is this minister working for and will he implement the Alberta NDP's AI data centre blueprint where we actually listen to Albertans?

Mr. Glubish: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are listening to Albertans and we understand that they have questions and they have concerns about what irresponsible projects in the United States look like, and they don't want that here. My message to them is that the Alberta government agrees with you. We don't want those types of projects done here, but we don't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater. The fact is that you can develop these projects responsibly. We have set the standards for what that looks like. We're further refining those standards to make them even better, and we work for Albertans, not for tech billionaires. We're going to hold every project proponent to our standards because we are here to protect Albertans first and always.

2:40 Rural Infrastructure Funding

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, rural Alberta depends on reliable infrastructure. Culverts, bridges, and roads are not luxuries. They are essential for moving agricultural products, supporting industry, and keeping community connected. Yet municipalities across Alberta are facing aging infrastructure and rising costs while critical projects are being delayed by this government's misaligned priorities. Why hasn't the government prioritized rural communities with the infrastructure funding they need to support their economic growth and public safety?

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

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're proud on this side of the House of all the investments that we are making in rural Alberta, but we're also investing in the cities. We have LRT projects going in Edmonton and Calgary. We have billions of dollars of capital projects going all across rural Alberta. We know that we have to invest in critical infrastructure to make sure that Albertans can enjoy their quality of life that they so enjoy here in the province. We're going to continue to invest in it. I would encourage the member opposite to maybe vote for one of our budgets that actually has funding for rural Alberta infrastructure.

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that after two significant fire emergencies since 2015 Fort McMurray residents understand better than most the importance of having multiple evacuation routes and given that the proposed bridge and ring road would provide critical emergency access and redundancy and given that the government has now taken it off the priority list and it is not in the budget, why is this government choosing not to invest in infrastructure that could save lives during future emergencies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, if the member was at RMA this morning, we talked about the importance of northern Alberta and making sure that we can have the infrastructure investments there to make sure that not only can we get products to market, but also to ensure that families can get home safely. When it comes to safety egress, the member from Fort McMurray is right beside me. He talks about it all the time, the importance of highway 63 as well as highway 686 to make sure that when disasters may strike, there are ways for families to get home safely.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that businesses cannot invest when municipalities cannot grow and industry cannot expand without secure access to water and given that instead of treating water as critical economic infrastructure, this government continues to rely on piecemeal solutions, when will this minister commit to building regional water hubs that support long-term economic growth and drought resiliency in rural Alberta and stop picking winners and losers?

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the member should be a little careful talking about water infrastructure because her leader, the NDP leader and the mayor of Calgary, has lots of issues when it comes to water that I'm sure we'll talk about in further question periods. But when it comes to water infrastructure all across this province, we have two grant streams, water for life as well as the Alberta water, waste-water grant programs. We work closely with municipalities to make sure that we can build that infrastructure for the benefit of all Albertans.

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

Members' Statements
(continued)

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

Education Property Taxes

Member Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Finance recently announced that the education property tax will be harmonized at $2.65 per $1,000 assessment across the province. For Calgary that's a reduction from $2.76 per $1,000 assessment. After a $338 increase in this year's budget alone, Calgarians are getting

maybe a measly 77 bucks back. But that's on par for this government who have prioritized everything but affordability since they took power in 2023.

Calgarians have seen their education property taxes increase by 90 per cent and more than $900 since 2023. In that same period this government has opened a grand total of four new public schools in Calgary. So where are all these education property taxes going if they're not opening new schools? That's what my constituents are asking me. They know that this UCP government increased the total education property tax requisition by $600 million in the current budget year, yet that $600 million did nothing to reduce class sizes or fix the problems teachers face with classroom complexity. Classrooms are still too large, too complex, and students lack the adequate resources parents are begging this government to provide. Surely these much higher education property taxes are resulting in better funding flowing to the front lines. Again, no.

Alberta ranks eighth – yes, eighth – in per capita funding for education in Canada. Just like Trump telling Americans to accept higher costs – look how that worked out for him yesterday – this government wants everybody to just accept higher property taxes while the government fails to deliver on one of the most fundamental responsibilities: educating our children.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 39
Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2026 (No. 2)

Mr. Wright: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise and request leave to introduce my first bill ever in the Legislature: Bill 39, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2026 (No. 2).

This bill will enable the Alberta government to strengthen protections to support vulnerable Albertans, improve legislative clarity, and support a modern effective health care system for Albertans. It also makes targeted, important amendments to several health statutes to make sure Alberta's health legislation continues to meet the evolving health care needs of our province. This legislation is a step forward to a better health care system for Albertans. Therefore, I move first reading of the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2026 (No. 2).

[Motion carried; Bill 39 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of a letter from a constituent talking about the difficulty in the transition from AISH to ADAP.

The Speaker: Edmonton-West Henday.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite copies of the reports that I referenced yesterday in my submissions for Bill 33. The first is the Affirmative Action Mythbusters by the African American Policy Forum.

The second is a Canadian HR Reporter article by Sarah Dobson called Why Alberta's DEI Ban Gets 'Merit' Backwards, issued yesterday.

And the third is the research paper by Diane Dechief and Philip Oreopoulus from the University of Toronto from 2012, called Why Do Some Employers Prefer to Interview Matthew but not Samir? New Evidence from Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a document created by a constituent named Marcia Tyerman. It is a receipt for $2.2 billion purchased at UCP wholesale. Customer note: no returns; retain for your records.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of an article written by Rick Bell in the *Calgary Herald* entitled [Premier's] Wake-up Call – Poll Finds NDP Would Win an Alberta Election Today.

The Speaker: Calgary-Edgemont.

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five documents from the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters. Today they put out their '24-25 shelter impact report called The Cost of Leaving.

The Speaker: Calgary-Elbow.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five requisite copies of an e-mail from constituent Susan Dai to my office calling on this House to reject the UCP's revised electoral map.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of hon. Minister LaGrange, Minister of Hospital and Surgical Health Services, pursuant to the Health Quality Council of Alberta Act Health Quality Alberta 2025-26 annual report.

The Speaker: Okay. Now we're at points of order. I witnessed some very good debate from both sides of the House without points of order. My hat is off to all of you.

Thank you.

2:50

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Electoral Boundaries

45. Mr. Amery moved:
    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 Government Motion 37;
    B. and be it further resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce a bill to establish new electoral divisions for Alberta in accordance with the proposals of the independent advisory panel.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to start off by making it clear, especially for all of the members in this Assembly,

why this independent advisory panel was created in the first place. After the Electoral Boundaries Commission completed its work, Justice Dallas Miller made a series of recommendations about how the final map could be improved. He said: "Much of the objection to our interim report is based on the loss of two rural seats. I lament this, as do my fellow Commissioners." He later recommended "that the Assembly make amendments to the Electoral Divisions Act, increasing the number of electoral divisions from 89 to 91 for the next general election."

We took that advice, Mr. Speaker. We took that recommendation, and we amended the Electoral Divisions Act last spring to do just that. The independent advisory panel was then tasked with proposing a 91-seat map and incorporating the direction contained in recommendation 5 in the majority opinion of the report, while respecting the Charter requirement for effective representation. Now, this was not some partisan exercise. This was the recommendation of the Electoral Boundaries Commission report.

The panel, the independent advisory panel, was then chaired by former Alberta Court of Appeal Justice Brian O'Ferrall. He served on the Alberta Court of Justice beginning in 2005. He was appointed to the Court of Appeal in 2011, and he remained there until his retirement in 2022. He is a highly respected and a highly regarded jurist with hundreds of reported decisions here in our province.

Now, the panel itself was comprised of two members appointed by the Official Opposition and two members appointed by the government. When the NDP throws around terms and accusations like "gerrymandering," Albertans need to look at the facts. The independent panel met. They had the benefit of the materials that were submitted to the Electoral Boundaries Commission. They reviewed the reports, they reviewed the submissions, they reviewed the data, they debated, and they came to a number of conclusions, Mr. Speaker.

There were a lot of things that all of the members agreed to on the panel. The report by the independent advisory panel is a product of those discussions. Nobody from the government had any input except for the members of the committee. Those were the only people who had input as to the maps that we have before this Assembly today. The members opposite seem to have forgotten what this nonpartisan process was about.

I also want to take a moment to talk a little bit about hybrid ridings. The NDP would have us all believe that combining urban and rural communities is some radical, new, and unusual idea. It isn't, Mr. Speaker. The panel itself makes this clear and says that hybrid electoral divisions have been in almost every electoral map of Alberta since its inception; they were given judicial sanction by the Alberta Court of Appeal in the early 1990s. Hybrid ridings already exist in Alberta.

Hybrid ridings also do something else. They bring together communities that share services, employment, infrastructure, and economic interests regardless of whether a municipal boundary happens to run between them. Nowhere is the contradiction in the NDP's position clearer than in Lethbridge.

Now, we can hear the Member for Lethbridge-West chirping in the background, but here is what happened. When the Member for Lethbridge-West went before the commission, he said: "What I would suggest is that we bring part of the county of Lethbridge into Lethbridge-West. I know that this is counter to what I just said about rural areas being part of urban." It's ironic, Mr. Speaker. Referring to the town of Coalhurst, a less than 10-minute drive from Lethbridge, he said in his own words, once again: "They're actually not municipalities, for one. Just about everything they do is in the city of Lethbridge." Those aren't our words. There are again members of the opposition chirping, but those are the words of the NDP Member for Lethbridge-West.

Lethbridge is southern Alberta's principal service, education, health, justice, transportation, and agrifood centre. Its hospitals, its courts, universities, and institutions serve a regional population extending far beyond the city's municipal boundaries. The independent panel's report highlights this, and they say: "There are 19 cities in the province of Alberta and all but Lethbridge have been part of a hybrid."

The purpose of the electoral boundaries review is to provide Albertans with meaningful and effective representation, whether they live in Calgary, Lethbridge, a smaller community, or rural and remote Alberta. Neither political party is going to get everything at once from an independent process. That is precisely the point. Our responsibility is to debate the independent report on its merits, make a decision, and give Elections Alberta the certainty it needs to begin preparations for the 2027 election, and that's exactly what we're focused on.

Once again, I am proud to move forward with Government Motion 45, and I look forward to the debate. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any other speakers? The Leader of the Official Opposition. I think you know this: you have up to 90 minutes.

Mr. Nenshi: Oh, I know. Don't worry, Mr. Speaker. I will not take that much time today. [interjections] Me too, me too.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I don't actually rise very often in motion and bill debate in this House. My colleagues do a great job of doing that, but I do rise when it's really critical work. It's really important for us to understand the implications of this government motion, as it has been in previous times when I have stood up in this House.

Mr. Speaker, today the UCP government is asking us to vote on a motion that goes to the very heart of democracy. Indeed, I would argue that it strikes a knife into the heart of Alberta's democracy.Since I've been in this role for about two and half years now, I've noticed something that I've never noticed before as a lifelong student of politics, as someone who's been in public life now for 16 years: a government that doesn't seem to care about those that it governs, a government that is not interested in governing as much as it is interested in maintaining its own power. For what purpose? As we heard in question period today, is it to spend $4,000 on a taxi ride which turns out to be a booze cruise? Is it for an all expense paid trip to Las Vegas? Is it to give Sam Mraiche and his endless nephews jobs? Is it to line the pockets of UCP insiders? I don't know. For me, power for power's sake is no power at all.

You should be doing work to help people live better lives. I said earlier today that the basic role of government is real simple: ease people's worries, ease their minds, just make their life a little bit better in the areas of your responsibility. Instead, we have a government that causes people to worry because they turn on the radio in the morning and they have no idea what group this government is attacking next. "Will it be me next?" many of them ask.

Right now this government is attacking the very fundamentals of democracy. Now, Mr. Speaker, politicians love to say that. It doesn't have very much political value to say that a government is antidemocratic. A lot of people don't care. They don't see democracy living in their lives every single day. They think it's something that they do every four years when they stand in line to vote. Folks on my side of the aisle, you know, think it's a great argument to say that people are being antidemocratic; it often doesn't land with citizens.

3:00

This is different. This government has been so shameless. They've gone so far that citizens in Alberta after the referendum are speaking of nothing less than this boundary map. I thought nobody knew the word "gerrymandering," but man, oh, man, when I hear

about it when I'm waiting to board a plane, when I hear about it in the grocery store, I realize that this government has gone way, way, way too far because as always, this government could not help itself.

They've done so many things, Mr. Speaker. They quietly privatized health care. You need a credit card now instead of a health card if you want fast knee surgery or hip surgery if you're living in pain. They took, as we heard from the Member for Calgary-Foothills, the best public education system in the world to one of the lowest funded in Canada. Classrooms are just as big as they were when they stripped away essential human rights from teachers. Nothing is better. Nothing has changed.

I was shocked on Monday myself, Mr. Speaker. We gave this government such an easy escape route. Only 14 of them before the referendum said that they stood up for Canada, and we gave them an easy chance to clear that map and say: "No, no. We all stand for Canada." The minister of transportation could not bring himself, despite being asked over and over and over again, to say one kind word about this nation, a nation whose public service runs in his own family. He couldn't actually vote or even say that he was going to vote for Canada, and I was shocked.

Mr. Dreeshen: I didn't work for the federal government.

Mr. Nenshi: He says now that he doesn't work for the federal government as though that's Canada. As though that's Canada. [interjection] Oh, well, he did work for the federal government. Then he should know even better that this is more than the ability to say: I'm not going to say because my residents might vote against it. As it turned out, his residents did vote for Canada, but he couldn't bring himself to say he was going to, and he still can't.

Mr. Speaker, that's the shocking thing about this government. Even when they're given a simple escape route, even when the Premier in her retroactive view of history says that she's always been a proud Canadian and a Canadian supporter, they still can't bring themselves to do it themselves. They can't bring themselves to say it themselves. In other words, this government regularly votes against the needs and priorities of Albertans and rather votes for the benefit of themselves.

Today this government motion is asking those of us in the House to do something that no government – no government – in Canadian history has ever done, to violate the right to vote, to violate section 3 of the Charter of Rights. It's a right that is so sacred that it is protected against what the Premier seems to think is a get-out-of-jail-free card, the notwithstanding clause. The reason for that is very, very simple. No political party should ever be able to infringe upon the very rights that hold them accountable. Voters should always have the right to fire their representatives at the ballot box. That's how democracy works.

Today we all have a choice. Do we uphold the right to vote or not? Do we uphold that sacred right or not? Do we uphold that fundamental right or not? Do we uphold that right that Albertans expect us to uphold, or do we vote to keep power in the hands of this current government? It's easy for me to tell how this side of the House will vote, Mr. Speaker. We don't support Government Motion 45. We don't support or agree with the UCP-appointed panel member report, which violates the rights of Albertans.

But it's important for me to explain for Albertans how we got here. If you were listening carefully to the Minister of Justice just now, he omitted a number of critical facts. To be clear, the government signalled its intention to do anything to stay in power years ago. The Premier is forever telling us about the massive population growth of Alberta. In fact, the population of Alberta had grown 20 per cent since the last boundary redraw, but that growth, Mr. Speaker, was not uniform across the province. The vast majority of that growth was in Calgary and Edmonton, with a little bit of that growth in some of the mid-sized cities like Grande Prairie, Red Deer, and, of course, Lethbridge.

So in this very House the Minister of Justice stood up and said: we don't want this independent commission to actually reflect the population growth of Alberta; despite a 20 per cent increase in population, we want only two more seats. Why would he have done that? Because the government hoped that those two seats would go to rural areas, or the government thought that adding two seats to Calgary and Edmonton they could live with. They could be competitive at least in Calgary if not in Edmonton, and they would be okay.

But when the independent boundaries commission got down to work, they realized that the math just didn't work. If you only added one seat to Calgary and one seat to Edmonton, you would run out of the constitutional bounds of population with the rural areas, so they were forced to remove two rural seats as well. Yes, it is true that Justice Miller in recommendation 5 says that he laments that they were given that problem because there was no way of ensuring that the seats in Calgary and Edmonton didn't go above that 20 per cent boundary without removing those rural seats. But here's the problem, Mr. Speaker. One of those rural seats belonged to the Minister of Finance, then the minister of assisted living. The Premier knows that she needs him and the side of the party that he represents in order to stay in power.

I remember watching this in real time, Mr. Speaker. It was one of my first days in the House, and it was fascinating because the Minister of Justice was asked in question period about the independent panel. He waxed eloquent about how the panel was completely independent, it had nothing to do with the UCP, and they would accept the panel's recommendations because it was an independent panel. Not even 20 minutes later we received the report. None of us had seen it before, and I started flipping through it and went: oh, this actually looks like a fair map. I watched the Minister of Justice in real time open the report, look at the maps, and I watched the colour drain from his face because it was a unanimous report, because their appointees had sat with our appointees and the chair, Justice Miller, to create a fair map.

The very next day I asked him: do you still believe that it's an independent panel, and do you support the independent panel? And I got backtracking like you've never seen before. As always with this government, it was a tell. The government's own aims were thwarted. Why were they thwarted? Because hundreds if not thousands of Albertans turned up in record numbers, the highest public participation of any public boundaries commission or any other public commission anyone's seen in years and years. Hundreds of Albertans all saying: we want fair maps. The interim report reflected that conclusion.

Now, did I love it? Mr. Speaker, I did not love that map. I didn't love what it did to my own riding, Edmonton-Strathcona. I didn't love what it did to the parts of east and northeast Calgary where I grew up. I didn't even like the hybridization a little bit of Calgary and Edmonton. The Minister of Justice misspoke; it's certainly true that hybrids have been part of Alberta electoral maps for a long time, but not in Calgary and Edmonton. The government actually changed the law to allow hybrids in Calgary and Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, I live on the eastern boundary of the city of Calgary. Across Stoney Trail there are acreages, there are people in country residential living. They're my neighbours. I know a lot of them, and they deliberately decided to live outside of the city. But I can buy the argument that they're literally across the street and perhaps a few of them should be lumped in with my neighbourhood rather than with Strathmore hundreds of kilometres away. I don't love it. I don't think it's ideal, but, you know, as Justice Miller said, sometimes you put water in your wine in these things.

I didn't love that interim report. It wasn't the one I would have written, but guess what? I don't get to write the report. Neither does the Premier. It was, in fact, an independent report. The map in that report is not for me to love. It's not for any member of this House to love or not love. It's a map for Albertans to be able to feel like they're voting with their neighbours and their communities. It's a map for them to know that when the time comes, their voice will matter. As I said, it was clear the government didn't love the map. As I said, the colour drained from the Minister of Justice's face as he looked at it. His own riding, by the way, was hybridized in that independent report.

Something then changed. The boundary commission went through another set of public hearings to look for a final report. Much to my surprise, hundreds of Albertans showed up, the vast majority of whom said: hey, good job. Those of us who've been in politics for a long time know that the public never shows up to say, "Hey, good job," but in this case they did, and it was a really impressive view of how people in the community think about democracy.

But something weird happened. A very small number of people in the public started showing up with maps of their own to the boundary commission. I'm a political nerd. I'm particularly a mapping nerd. So as a normal citizen, as the mayor of Calgary I have testified in many boundary commissions. It never occurred to me to use software to create maps to show to people. This never ever happens.

When you looked at these maps, taken together they covered the whole province. They appeared to project the expected election results, they were all in the same font, they were all in the same colour, they were all in the same style, and one of them forgot to remove the government document identifier. It was a document that was created by the government to interfere in a potentially supposedly independent process.

3:10

What happened next was astounding. Those UCP-appointed members of the commission, who didn't ask any questions in the public hearing, who had voted for the majority map in the interim, suddenly changed their mind. Even though the final report was very similar to the interim report except for the Minister of Justice's riding, interestingly, suddenly the thing they had voted for a couple of months earlier was unacceptable, and they wrote a minority report that had, as Justice Miller pointed out in the passage that the Minister of Justice started to read and then stopped, real constitutional and administrative law problems. Why would they do that? Who benefits from that? Only the government.

Justice Dallas Miller, a conservative-minded justice from Medicine Hat, Alberta, stood up for the law. Now, sure, he said that he wished that the government hadn't forced him into 89 ridings, that his job would have been easier with 91 ridings. Remember, he was a UCP appointee. But he was so concerned that he wrote his own addendum, the thing that we call recommendation 5.

Now, the minister read a little bit of recommendation 5, but he didn't actually read what the justice was saying. I'll read a little bit of it to you now.

> Due to my deep concern regarding the unconstitutionality and administrative law problems of the minority report, I find it necessary to make one further recommendation that my fellow Commissioners cannot consent to. I am reasonably certain that, had we been given 91 electoral divisions, there would be no loss of any seats outside of Edmonton and Calgary. My majority colleagues do not agree with me on this point. That is why I am alone in making this recommendation . . . This fifth recommendation is formulated for the express purpose of dissuading the Legislature from accepting the minority report.

In other words, Justice Miller is saying: "I stand by my majority report. If you don't stand by it, if you're not going to pass it, then for God's sake don't do what the minority members wanted to do. Here is another escape clause. Here's a way for you to manage it." Specifically he says that you can put back in Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland and Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, now Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

> However, restoration of the two electoral [districts] should:
>
> a) have no impact on any electoral division in Airdrie or containing territory south of Airdrie's southernmost border, with the exception of Drumheller-Stettler;
> b) have no impact on any electoral division north of the North Saskatchewan River in Edmonton;
> c) result in all electoral divisions south of the North Saskatchewan River in Edmonton reverting to the map outlined in the interim report, with the possible exception of including Nisku in Edmonton-South East if the all-party committee wishes to [do that].

And so on.

The point being that he had a very specific mandate. I'll be honest with you, Mr. Speaker. I didn't love it, but we could have lived with that mandate on this side if in fact the government had followed Justice Miller's recommendation. It's not good for us electorally, but I understand that that's a little bit of fairness.

So I asked the Premier over and over and over again in the spring: are you only going to take Justice Miller's recommendation? She said yes, but then she qualified it over and over and over again. Had she simply said yes, had she simply hired Justice Miller to chair the new panel, it would have been a couple of days' work for him, and we would have had this all done in the spring. Had she done that, we wouldn't be here today. But as always this government couldn't help itself. Ever since 1994 when the Court of Appeal gave a landmark decision here in Alberta on boundaries, every single government has adopted the commission's recommended maps without interference. This government refused to do that. Instead, they started the sham process, which, frankly, has been shameful.

I got a lot of political advice, Mr. Speaker, saying, "Don't even appoint anybody to that panel; it's a total sham," and I said: "I'm not doing that because we want to know what they're up to. We want to know what they're doing." So my colleagues the MLAs for Edmonton-Mill Woods and Calgary-Mountain View took one for the team and they sat through every single one of these meetings. They tried again and again to prevent partisanship from tainting the process. They tried to bring in transparency. They tried to bring in reporting. They tried to safeguard the most sacred right Albertans have, and the UCP members said no every single time.

Here we are with the most gerrymandered map in the history of this country. How did we get here? I'll say again that the Minister of Justice was being remarkably disingenuous in his comments. He said that nobody talked to the independent commission, but the report itself makes it clear that that's not true.

You know, when you get these big reports, you rarely read the acknowledgments page. It usually says: thanks to my mom. But the acknowledgments page says right here that they talked only to the UCP appointees of the previous commission. They didn't talk to Justice Miller. They didn't talk to the majority members, who, by the way, were not NDP partisans. One of them was the leader of a different political party. They didn't talk to them. They didn't talk to the public.

In fact, the report contradicts itself in multiple places where sometimes it says, "We listened to the public on this," and sometimes it says, "We were not at all required to listen to the public."

Let me just put in a sidebar here. I said "we." It doesn't say "we." It's the strangest report. It uses the word "I" over and over again, but it's not signed, so I'm assuming that the "I" refers to the chair

of the commission, but you never know. Is he speaking for the majority? Is he speaking for himself only? Is he speaking for all five members? It's just not clear. I think he really loves golf, though, because on almost every page we hear about how golf courses are very important markers for how people live their lives. That's all I can tell.

There's also something else weird in here – and I'll get to it in just a second – which is when we think about who it is that they talked to. Now, let's be clear. We appointed two members of this committee. I don't believe I've ever met either of them. We appointed one person who is a distinguished professor of constitutional law at the University of Alberta, and we appointed a member from Okotoks who I think was a councillor in Okotoks. We deliberately didn't talk to them at all, and we let them do their work.

This is obviously not what happened on the other side. Justice O'Ferrall, a very distinguished jurist, retired four years ago and almost immediately started making political donations to conservative causes. The other two members of the panel are frequent UCP donors. One of them runs a lobbying business that sustains itself on government business, and he made a donation to the UCP while he was a member of the "independent" panel. I put independent in real big quotes there because, of course, nothing about this panel was independent in any way.

The report spends more time insulting the minority members of the panel, calling them sanctimonious and judgy and saying that they were a waste of time, than it actually takes listening to their questions or actually answering the results. It makes the extraordinary claim that it doesn't have to be legal or constitutional, that they're just providing this for advice.

Mr. Speaker, if I may, if it doesn't have to be legal or constitutional, why the heck would we have a judge chairing the panel? Of course it has to be legal and constitutional; otherwise, we end up in court. Yet the author of the report says: we don't really care about that; that's the Legislature's risk to take on.

What we know is that the panel went well beyond the mandate given to them. Government Motion 37 is based on recommendation 5. Recommendation 5 clearly says: don't touch anything south of Airdrie. The reason for this is obvious, Mr. Speaker. This is partisan, and it's gerrymandering.

Every single riding south of Airdrie that this report touched adds conservative votes to the seat of a vulnerable UCP minister, every single one, yet we're supposed to believe this is not partisan, that it was a pure coinkydink that this happened. Obviously this was done for partisan reasons.

Interestingly, I looked through Calgary and went through the most vulnerable UCP ministers in Calgary based on the last election. Every one of them got a favourable change to their riding, except, interestingly, the Minister of Justice, but strangely there's an addendum. There's another recommendation that is signed by the two UCP donors, I mean, appointees, to the committee that says: we forgot about Calgary-Cross, which happens to be the Minister of Justice's riding, and you should probably fix Calgary-Cross, too.

3:20

It says: the information about Calgary-Cross reached us too late. And by the way, they say that it's the northeast Calgary problem. I live in northeast Calgary, and three of the four ridings that they call the northeast Calgary problem are not actually in northeast Calgary. They couldn't even get the geography right. That said, "the information reached us too late," yet didn't the Minister of Justice just say that they didn't talk to anybody? So who was giving them the information too late? Could it possibly be the person who wanted a better riding because he knows he's going to lose in the next election?

Ms Hoffman: Inshallah.

Mr. Nenshi: Inshallah, and both he and I can say that.

Look, at the end of the day, the only ridings in Calgary that were touched are the ridings where we have vulnerable UCP ministers. My colleagues will say much more about Lethbridge, but I want to highlight one thing about Lethbridge, which is this. There are hybrid ridings and there are hybrid ridings. Adding Conrich to Calgary-Falconridge, which is adding a small number of acreages to an existing neighbourhood across the highway: I still don't like it, but I can understand the rationale. Adding Nisku to the very south part of Edmonton: I can kind of get it. Though going southeast Edmonton like a lizard over to Nisku: a bit weird. I can kind of get that.

That is not the same as taking 40 per cent of the population of the third-largest city of Alberta, cracking it apart, and putting people all the way up to the Trans-Canada highway from Lethbridge basically to my house or all the way to the U.S. boundary or all the way to the Saskatchewan and B.C. boundaries. Red Deer is exactly the same size as Lethbridge.

Mr. Stephan: No. Red Deer is a little bigger.

Mr. Nenshi: It changes week on week.

The Speaker: As entertaining as this is – and it is entertaining – we probably should only be hearing from one person at a time.

Mr. Nenshi: I'm actually glad the Member for Red Deer-South raised that because if Red Deer and Lethbridge are similar, and they are, how come they left Red Deer alone and wiped Lethbridge off the map? Could it be because we have one seat in Lethbridge and we're going to win the next one? We're going to win Red Deer, too, but I wonder if that has anything to do with it. They actually argue in the map that one of the problems with the majority report was that there's a riding that encircles Lethbridge, and they didn't like that. But they drew a riding that encircles Red Deer. The fact is that the hypocrisy here is very, very clear.

My colleagues will have a lot more to say about this, Mr. Speaker, but I simply want to say that the government has claimed all along that its motivation in throwing out the maps and setting us out on this sham process was simply to restore two rural ridings. Both of those ridings could have been restored without touching anything south of Airdrie, but this government couldn't help itself. This commission couldn't help itself, and now we have a map that is clearly gerrymandered, that is clearly illegal, that is clearly unconstitutional. The government has one last chance to fix this, and that last chance is to throw this map out and do what they should have done six months ago, which is adopt the majority maps.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move to adjourn debate.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion to adjourn debate carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:24 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Jones	Sawyer

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

Against the motion:

Arcand-Paul	Eremenko	Metz
Batten	Ganley	Miyashiro
Brar, Gurinder	Goehring	Nenshi
Brar, Gurtej	Gray	Pancholi
Campbell	Hayter	Renaud
Ceci	Hoffman	Sabir
Dach	Hoyle	Schmidt
Deol	Ip	Sigurdson, L.
Eggen	Irwin	Sweet
Ellingson	Kasawski	Tejada
Elmeligi	Kayande	Wright, P.

Totals: For – 45 Against – 33

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Time Allocation on Government Motion 45

46. Mr. Amery moved:
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.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, I must say that I'm having a bit of déjà vu as I stand today and rise to speak to this motion on time allocation. I know there are folks watching at home because Albertans are fired up about this issue, and they might be wondering: what is time allocation? Well, it means that this UCP government is again limiting debate on a bill and in this case on a motion, but more than that, they are limiting the opportunity for duly elected members of this Chamber to speak to something of huge significance. Instead of allowing a fulsome debate, instead of allowing a diversity of perspectives on the motion in front of us, they've cut off the time.

Why do I say that I'm experiencing déjà vu today? Well, let me tell you. I've been an MLA in this Chamber since 2019, nearly eight years. [interjection] Yeah. Thank you, Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

But it's not a positive statement that I'm about to make. I've been a member for nearly eight years, and I've witnessed this UCP government introduce time allocation motions a whopping 86 times. Eighty-six times. You heard that correctly. It is under this UCP government that time allocation has been used more than ever in Alberta history.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear.

Member Irwin: And you can hear them cheering that for the folks listening at home. Cheering that. That is not a record to be proud of. Absolutely not.

I stand here in this Chamber just over a year, in fact, after this UCP government again limited time debate, and in that case they cut off debate on something incredibly unprecedented. That was Bill 2, the use of the notwithstanding clause against teachers, forcing them back to work. How unbelievably shameful it was at that time that members in the House did not get a chance to speak to that bill. Many of you may recall that this UCP government rammed through that bill, Bill 2, in record time. Did those members opposite care? Did any of them stand up? Did any of them push back? Did any of the private members even take a stance? No, they didn't. Leadership, of course, starts at the top, and many of you will recall that their Premier was often in Saudi Arabia.

3:40

Let's talk about the motion in front of us today. I should point out that the very minister who introduced this motion, you know, the person who had to defend cutting off debate, the Justice minister, just said yesterday in the House the following in regard to the Electoral Boundaries Committee report. "The report has now been tabled. Let's look at it, let's debate it, and let's make a decision as an Assembly." Okay, Minister. We're here. We're here to debate. We want to debate. Why won't you let us? How can you say we'll "make a decision as an Assembly" when the vast majority of members in this House will not get a chance to weigh in?

You might say: well, that's one quote from the minister. Well, let's go back to, oh, about one hour ago today. That member said the following. "We have a report tabled before the Assembly. We'll engage in robust debate – I am sure about that – and we'll let the Assembly decide what happens next." Robust debate: are you kidding me? What part of any of this is robust when we're literally being limited to one hour? Make it make sense.

Again, for those watching at home, in case you can't hear, we've got members opposite, UCP cabinet ministers laughing at the fact that our right as duly elected members is being curtailed by limiting debate.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: A point of order.

Point of Order
Imputing Motives

Mr. Schow: Madam Speaker, in many instances in this Chamber members are having conversations that may not be germane to the speech being given at the time. To associate any form of reaction, particularly with regard to laughter, to whatever the member is speaking about would be an unfair characterization. The member is clearly just trying to score cheap – and I emphasize the word "cheap" – political points in her impassioned speech. I believe that this is attributing unavowed and false motives to members on the government side, be it the caucus or one individual, and I ask the member to do better. This is not uncommon. You know what? I'll leave it at that.

Ms Gray: Madam Speaker, this is not a point of order. We're currently in a debate under time allocation. The Government House Leader is wasting time. If his members and his cabinet ministers

want to have side conversations, as per the Speaker's memo that we all received at the start of session, they should be doing that outside of this Chamber. When they are laughing while my members are talking, my perception, their perception, Albertans' perception is that they're laughing because of the content of the speech. I suggest they take their side conversations outside. Talking about the heckles we receive as we debate is a common practice in this Chamber. I submit to you that it is not a point of order, and we should allow continued debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Got to love the conversations around the first time allocation of the session, which is where we're at. It's probably most helpful to keep our comments on track, which I believe the hon. member – I was definitely going to also ask you to speak through the chair. Using things like, you know, "minister" is not speaking through the chair. "The minister" is speaking through the chair. I think that'll maybe keep the temperature down in this Chamber. It's not a point of order.

Please carry on. You've got less than a minute.

Debate Continued

Member Irwin: The point is that it's absolute hypocrisy, but more than that, it's a slap in the face to the voters of Alberta who elected us and sent us here to be their voice.

The report in question will fundamentally change the state of democracy in this province, and that's not hyperbole. For those who haven't been following, you need to know that the steps that this UCP government has taken in regard to the absolute gerrymandering of Alberta's electoral maps are absolutely unprecedented. These sorts of steps being taken by this UCP government merit fulsome, to quote the minister, robust debate. It's absolutely shameful that this UCP government is limiting it. Albertans deserve their MLAs to be able to speak out for them. Albertans deserve to have their voices matter at the ballot box, and I should say that voters should pick their politicians and politicians shouldn't pick their voters. So urging everyone watching . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, it feels like we were just here: a government using closure to curtail the debate that directly impacts the rights of Albertans. Just over a year ago this government rammed through legislation to strip teachers of their rights while refusing to address their very genuine concerns. Those teachers stood up for our children, for our classrooms, for our society, and the government took their right to advocate for themselves and others away.

Here we are again, ramming through the House a motion that will strip many Albertans of their rights. What exactly is it this government has chosen to limit time on? It's a motion that throws out the process that has been respected by governments of all stripes throughout the history of Alberta. An independent panel, majority UCP appointees, drew maps based on submissions from thousands of Albertans, but the UCP felt that their independent panel got a little too independent. Apparently, this panel or the commission just had too much respect for Albertans, so the UCP threw out what Albertans had to say, what the commission had to say, and the maps that were drawn by a fair process.

Over and over again in this House they rose to say that they were just adding back in two rural seats. That is absolutely not what the maps before us today do. To start with some basic math, they add back in three rural seats. Three is not two the last time I checked. Lethbridge is carved into four, a proposal that was opposed by people in the area 5 to 1 in submissions to the commission. A proposal without justification that treats the people in Lethbridge that are lumped into these rural ridings as, quote, spare population, to be used as the UCP sees fit.

But why do they need to use the people of Lethbridge at all? There's absolutely no need for a change here. Not on principle. Not to implement the addendum that they claim to be implementing. In fact, Justice Miller was explicit in his addendum, saying that they did not need to impact anything south of Airdrie. Now, it seems that some members over there are confused about the locations of Airdrie and Lethbridge, but Lethbridge is in fact south of Airdrie.

There is no justification based on relevant considerations for this, but it does have the interesting side effect of saving one UCP cabinet minister and ensuring that two others are not required to run for a nomination in the same riding. No justification, though, on relevant considerations like the people of this province. Once again we seem to have a government putting their interests, the interests of cabinet ministers, above the interests of Albertans, which is not what we were sent here to do.

In Calgary three UCP ministers have been protected by splitting Springbank in two. There is no reason for this. The riding in which they were previously, was already underpopulated, but, for no reason, they must be removed from that riding and added into Calgary in not one seat but three. Springbank is split between two ridings to defend two UCP cabinet ministers. Those people chose to live outside of Calgary, but the UCP is happy to use them to defend their ministers. We are talking about a process that impacts Albertans, that impacts free and fair elections, that impacts the rights of these people, and that right is the right to vote.

Back a year ago I said that a government that is willing to come for the rights of one group will surely come for others. At the time they called me hyperbolic, and I wish they had been right, but I stand here today, much to my own disappointment, having been proven right by this government that when they come for the rights of one group, they come for all.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

3:50

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I stand in opposition to Government Motion 46, which is limiting the amount of time we will have to debate Government Motion 45. Government Motion 45 is about adopting the new panel maps that have come back from a process that talked to zero Albertans. It is absolutely disrespectful to all of the Albertans who engaged with the process of the original boundary commission, the regular, transparent, expected, and normal process. And it is disrespectful to all Albertans that this new report disenfranchises and violates the rights for those Albertans.

To not only have the government embark on a whole process that is unheard of, that they essentially made up, to the point that when the Official Opposition would get legal advice from the Legislative Assembly on what this clause meant or what might happen, we couldn't always get answers, through no fault of the legal team but because this was an entirely made-up process. The government just wrote a motion to create it out of thin air, and the complications and the confusion that that caused, and now not even giving the Official Opposition and specifically Albertans adequate time to understand what is happening on something not only this complex but something this fundamental to our democracy and to their right to choose their representatives in the future, is shocking and disappointing.

Now, I must emphasize that this is the second time that time allocation has been used on this very process, because Government Motion 37, which set out how the new panel would work and what

it looked like, was time allocated. We weren't even given enough time to argue and ask questions and pose questions and potentially amend to improve that government motion before the government just steamrolled on with their agenda to gerrymander maps and to get a different map that would better suit their needs.

One of my biggest frustrations throughout this process is that this is a fundamental piece, a complicated piece, and yet the government deliberately seems to be using the incorrect language on a regular basis to confuse what's happening both to media, in this Chamber, and to Albertans.

To be very clear, there has been one commission. That commission had a majority report and only a majority report. There was a recommendation signed by one member of the commission and one member only. I've heard that characterized as: all members wanted it; the majority wanted it. Neither of those things are true. One member.

Even in moving Government Motion 45 in this Chamber, the Minister of Justice quoted one line from the very top, "Much of the objection to our interim report is based on the loss of two rural seats. I lament this, as do my fellow Commissioners," and he stopped reading right there. If you continue reading, Madam Speaker, you see, and my leader started to enter into this quote earlier on, but I want to emphasize that when he talks about the addendum to the majority report, he says clearly, "That is why I am alone in making this recommendation." Yet the government keeps characterizing it as if the commission or the majority has set us on this path.

Very clearly, neither the UCP appointees to the commission nor the NDP appointees to the commission signed on to this recommendation 5. One person alone put that option on the table, and the government leapt at it and then actively misled Albertans as to what that meant.

Recommendation 5 reads clearly:

> However, 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.

Lo and behold, we receive a report that is the exact opposite. Our Premier in one of the many media reports about this said, quote, there will be knock-on effects by adding in two additional rural ridings, but the intention and what the judge gave his advice on was how to do that with a minimal impact on the rest of the majority report. End quote.

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have limited time to speak to this motion, and because of this motion I know that I and many of my caucus members – and then on behalf of the thousands and millions of Albertans that they represent – will not have their voices heard. I rise to speak against this motion for time allocation and, further, to speak against the motion to accept the report that was developed by a process that was not independent, that was not nonpartisan, and that was clearly a sham from the beginning.

I want to begin my brief comments, because I only have this much time, to say that the members across the way have repeatedly raised comments made by myself and one of my other colleagues during the public input process under the truly independent Alberta boundaries commission process, in which we talked about how, yes, it would have been appropriate given the extraordinary population increase in both Edmonton and Calgary for there to have been more than the 89 seats that this government chose to pass through legislation. Now, let me be clear. That decision to establish only two more electoral seats was a result of that government's choice. They did not want to allocate more seats to the Alberta Legislature because they knew that in a fair process, done through an independent commission with public consultation, that would result in the outcome being that any additional seats would have to go where population had increased the most, and that's Edmonton and Calgary. They knew that, which is why they deliberately passed legislation only allowing for two more new seats.

When submissions were made through the truly independent Alberta boundaries commission process, those submissions were made on the basis of the law that this government passed. If this government was going to, then, do what they're doing now, try to increase the number of seats to 91, they, in my view, would have had to have struck an entirely new independent boundaries commission, truly independent, following the process set out in the legislation, and repeat all of the public consultation based on the additional seats. Madam Speaker, from the beginning this process seems to be rigged. It seems as if it is designed to give the governing party more seats where they feel they are more likely to win and not to truly reflect the needs of Albertans to have – the rights, I should say, of Albertans to have their voices effectively represented in their Legislature.

I want to highlight that this map essentially robs voters in Alberta's four largest cities of their vote. On average now, as a result of the map that has now been put forward by a nonindependent process – I'm just going to put a pin in that for a moment, Madam Speaker.

Let's be clear. This is not an independent process that has happened under the UCP. This has never been done before in Canadian history. This is the first government in Alberta since 1994 to completely reject maps that have been developed fairly through an independent boundaries commission process. They have established an unprecedented format which has elected officials, MLAs, a majority of which are UCP MLAs, on a committee to receive a report from a process that did not include a single drop of public consultation. It was a dramatically different map than that was even proposed in either the minority or the majority report from the independent boundaries commission. Not one essence of public input in that process.

We just found out, Madam Speaker, as well that there are three appointees by the UCP to this sham panel that they established, and three of those appointees have connections to the governing party, including one member who made donations to the UCP while he was sitting as a panel member on this process. There's nothing about this that's independent, and we should not accept the UCP's characterization of it like that.

Madam Speaker, this process is truly about putting the UCP's interests above that of Alberta voters. We will have a conversation about how now these proposed boundaries are going to be giving the voters in Calgary and Edmonton less of a voice in their Legislature. On average, as a result of this panel's suggested maps, the ones that this government wants to pass, each riding in Calgary and Edmonton will have 7,000 more voters than a riding in any other part of the province.

You know, this is a problem that this government has created and refuses to address. They know that they cannot win in the cities, in the large cities of this province so they have to – this government appears to feel they have to cheat to win, and that is what it feels like they are doing right now, Madam Speaker. They are clearly trying to change the outcome. But here's the thing. Electoral boundaries are actually not about the results. They're not about electoral results. They're not about levelling the playing field. As the Premier's chief of staff has repeatedly said publicly: this is not about that.

4:00

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, as we debate this time allocation motion, what comes to mind for me is that there are three words that lie behind everything this Premier and government say and do. Those three words: know your place. Every nice, smiling video with soft lighting with which these government leaders appear, where they talk so kindly to the camera – the message behind it: know your place; know that we are in charge and you are not. When they stand in front of that camera and they tell Albertans, "Hey, you should blame those 400,000 people who signed the Forever Canadian petition. They're the reason we called that separatism referendum," that's the message behind their little smirk while they say it: know your place.

They want Albertans to know that this government – elected, I should say, with the slimmest mandate, the slimmest majority of any government in our history. They take that as a mandate to do whatever they want and to deny agency to anyone else. They want you to know that they have power; they have control. You don't. Albertans don't. That is precisely what this is about today as they shut down debate on what may be the most significant breach of Albertans' right to vote we have ever seen in this province.

The message we get from this government, that they are telling Albertans: it doesn't matter what you say; it doesn't matter what you do. They will twist your words. "We will misrepresent your intent. We will bend the truth, abuse and warp our very systems of democracy to justify doing whatever we wanted to do anyways."

Now, they'll try to wrap it up in nice language. They talk about, well, Alberta priorities and Alberta values, but let's be very clear. What they mean is this Premier's priorities, this Premier's values, and what we have seen very clearly is that they are nowhere near the priorities of everyday Albertans. For all their talk, Madam Speaker, about freedom of expression, neutrality, and free speech, this is a Premier and a government that have no interest in listening to or representing Albertans as they actually are in all of their complexity, diversity of thought, and opinion.

That's why they're limiting this debate on moving forward with, again, what might be the biggest infringement on Albertans' right to vote in our province's history. That's why by every indication this government looks to be moving towards rigging the map to ensure that they only have to listen to the Albertans they like: their supporters, party members, and donors; the folks that they favour with sole-source contracts. This is the most heavy-handed government I think Albertans have ever seen.

Their consistent message to Albertans: "Know your place. Your place is not to question us. Your place is not to tell us what you want. Your place is to listen to what we tell you, do what we tell you, support what we tell you to support. Hey, you're going to vote where we tell you to vote. Alberta will be what we say it will be." Well, Madam Speaker, I'll tell you something. I know my place. My place is right here. My place is representing the voices and the values of the people that sent me here. I don't know how many of these government MLAs and ministers can say the same because they're far more interested in representing their government to their constituents than their constituents to their own government.

This motion – this government's unprecedented partisan processes, rigged and gerrymandered map – hurts the people that I'm here to represent. This government has no interest in hearing their voice or their values, tells the citizens of Lethbridge: "Yeah. A few of you can have your little opposition MLA. The rest of you will vote where we tell you to vote. You will accept what we tell you to accept, and if you try to say anything different, we'll twist your words, and we'll have a good smirk while we're doing it." That is what we see. It's a profoundly unserious government, Madam Speaker, but incredibly serious consequences for Albertans and for the state of our democracy.

What we just saw yesterday, Madam Speaker, is that folks that gerrymander, folks that play these MAGA games: in the end it catches up with them. We're here to make sure that Albertans know Albertans' voice is respected and that this government pays the price.

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

Member Kayande: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Is opposition to an unpopular government legitimate? What a question. Like, LOL. What a question, but here I am today standing up in this House of debate arguing against a time allocation motion where, fundamentally, I have to start with the premise that loyal opposition to an unpopular debate, to an unpopular government is actually legitimate. By quashing debate in this manner, the government is sending a clear signal not just to the 45 per cent of Albertans who voted for the opposition but to every single Albertan that no dissent will be tolerated.

It's a very clear signal. It's the same signal that they send to Albertans every time they say that the 400,000 signatories of the Forever Canadian petition are responsible for a referendum that they never asked for. It is a blatantly untrue misreading of the facts to say something like that. It is an insult to 400,000 Albertans. Not just to the 400,000 Albertans, but it is an insult to every single Albertan that an Albertan can say that the sky is blue and this government turns around and says: look at all the Albertans who said that the sky is yellow.

Why? Why are we here? Why we are here is because this government has decided that holding power at all costs starts with stifling debate in this House, and if you can stifle debate in this House, you can stifle debate across the province. They do not have an agenda that speaks to the very real affordability concerns of every single Albertan. They increase property taxes by $1,000, $1,500 per household in my riding and give back $200 of it and say that we should be grateful. We should be grateful that we're getting 200 bucks back because, lordy, it could've have been $1,500 and – you know what? – maybe next time it'll be $500 because you keep voting against us, and we're going to keep making sure, according to this government, that keeps happening because they don't have to worry about losing their seats because they'll fix the maps.

It's an authoritarian agenda woven from whole cloth with the warp of quashing debate holding together the weft of shady deals, taxpayer-funded bourbon trips, half-million-dollar red carpets, golden cats, private jet junkets, and the cherry on top is the RCMP investigations looking at it. This is a government that is unafraid of facing electors because – you know what? – if they're ever unpopular, if they ever lose the safest urban conservative seat in Canada, they'll just fix the maps, and they won't even let us talk about it, won't even let us debate that. It's a hell of a perspective on governance. It's a very real tragedy that the people of Alberta who elected a government in good faith are getting, instead, a government that is planning to hold power forever.

Now, how did we get here? See, the independent boundaries commission, the Miller commission, the original – the OG, as my kids would say – the OG boundary commission published a set of maps, and alone amongst any government in Canadian history, this government looked at these maps and said: "Ugh, looks hard. It's a lot of doors I need to knock. I'd rather just . . ."

4:10

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

Member Campbell: I joined the political fray at a tumultuous moment. I was spurred to action by my own health care experience, knowing that the UCP have presided over a marked deterioration of health care delivery in this province. I quickly learned in local conversations about the dire status of our education system, an issue acutely localized to my riding. Within 51 days I have raised my

voice in support of Canada to help save our country; I've stood up for the right of every child to have an education; for the need to care for all who call Alberta home, new immigrant or not; now I raise my voice to defend the right for elected representatives to speak to a bedrock principle of the democracy we so freely enjoy.

Like most Albertans I expect elected representatives to speak for the will of the people. I am here to speak, but this government has no time for representatives to speak. Albertans will not forget that their voices were only worth one hour of government time. How many of my colleagues have not had their voices heard today and the hundreds of thousands of Albertans they represent? Is this just? I am the MLA for all who voted for me and all who did not. They expect to be heard, to be represented. This is a foundational element of Canadian society.

I am watching in real time as this government runs amok, with 12 months left of what it prizes above all else, power. Rather than meet the moment, the UCP government shields itself in procedure and privilege to limit the speech of the people. The government has the power to limit debate to one hour. They have the power to implement these skewed maps. But having the power doesn't make the decision right. Governments and power come and go. Our democratic institutions must endure.

This morning I was moved by our service of remembrance held here in this building. We each wear a poppy to remember those who served. We say, "Lest we forget," to acknowledge those who made the ultimate sacrifice. What were those sacrifices for? When we walk into this Legislature, we pass by plaques commemorating those who served, who willingly risked their lives in defence of democracy, of freedom, of Canada. We have inherited a precious legacy.

Before I ever became a political candidate, I asked for my voice to be heard by this government. I submitted feedback to the boundaries commission. I was grateful to have the chance to be heard, and it worked. The process worked until the UCP government threw away the work of a public commission. This new committee report discards so many important points and careful consideration of Albertans, those who spoke and were heard by a nonpartisan commission. Now we see that those great efforts are tossed aside.

The UCP government was keen to burn $200 million of taxpayer money to ask 10 questions that are useless, $4 million to advertise the government's preferred position using public money. But now to spend extra time in soft chairs: impossible. Albertans are tired of these petty politics. I know they were tired of it in August and September when a by-election was held. How tired will they be of this pettiness after these ridiculous maps? How many ballots were cast in the referendum: 22,120,141. What a waste. The most expensive vote in Canadian history and not a single person was elected. The results are being glossed over by this government. The public is being told just to forget about this. Twenty-two million pieces of paper in the garbage: not a brick laid, no surgeries funded, no mandate. Just a waste.

How much does it cost to have us stay in this Chamber? Nothing. Salaries are paid whether their representatives work or not. This building will be heated and lit. Everything is paid in full. No Albertan voted for this behaviour. There is no mandate, only entitlement: entitled to votes, entitled to public money, entitled to perpetual rule. Calgary-Shaw sent a message. Voters lost faith in this government. It's tangible. I watched it from one week to the next. I met people who said: I voted Conservative my whole life and cannot any longer. This government jeopardized our country and lost the everyday Albertans who are proud of who we are, proud of our country, and proud of our culture.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak against the time allocation motion. The independent boundary commission led by Justice Miller presented its final report. The UCP didn't like the majority commission's report, a map created by an independent process that consulted hundreds of thousands of Albertans, so they threw it out, created a secret process that they controlled, and that allowed them to gerrymander and create their own maps.

The UCP is refusing to be held accountable to Albertans. It's an abuse of power, and it's simply wrong. This is bad for both urban and rural voters, who deserve to have an MLA in their communities who understands their issues. Albertans won't stand for rigged maps or rigged elections. It is disrespectful to all of us. We deserve to have a fair process to redraw boundaries. We used to have that fair process, but the UCP threw it out. We won't stand for that.

The map we see before us ignored one of the chair's most important recommendations: not to touch anywhere in Airdrie or south of Airdrie. The changes made to southern Alberta by the UCP panel have no rhyme or reason other than to shore up their own voter base because the UCP government is scared of losing power. Boundaries redrawn shouldn't be about any political party. It should be about Albertans. This process adopted by the UCP disrespects all of our input and tramples on every Albertans' rights.

The government decided their own cabinet ministers matter more than the democratic rights of the people of Lethbridge and surrounding areas. The government is carving Lethbridge into four ridings that provide worse representation for voters. The worst part is that the people of Lethbridge said loud and clear that they didn't want this. They're more than just the spare population that the UCP majority says they are.

Government is after what the independent commission refused to give them, a riding that breaks through the boundaries of cities to add in areas around it, all so that the UCP can protect some of the most unpopular members and ministers in their caucus. The UCP knows that they need to win seats in Calgary to win the next election, and they also know that the UCP far-right agenda, culture wars, and wasteful referendum are so deeply unpopular in Calgary. Case in point, Madam Speaker, the Calgary-Shaw by-election. The UCP is trying hard to protect its unpopular MLAs and to hold on to power.

Let's be clear. The gerrymandering of Calgary-Bow, Calgary-North West, or Calgary-West is justified based on golf courses rather than the input of actual people living in the area. The term that comes to mind is "out of touch." It's insulting to strip voters of their voices, which is also what these maps do.

As was noted by the minority of the panel, the proposed majority recommendation exacerbates the underrepresentation of the four largest cities in Alberta. If implemented as proposed by the UCP majority members, the constituencies in Edmonton and Calgary would have about 7,000 more people on average than the districts outside those cities. That is unreasonable. That is unacceptable. This is what they're trying to time allocate and ram through. Time allocation is not a tool used by a government confident of its actions, policies, or proposed legislation. It's a tool of a government that is afraid of scrutiny.

4:20

The UCP has normalized the notion that debate can simply be shut down in this House when inconvenient by way of time allocation, and that is not okay. Albertans deserve better than this, and I urge everyone to vote against this motion.

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

Member Gurinder Brar: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to begin by saying thank goodness the UCP wasn't around when Moses received the Ten Commandments. They would have invoked time allocation after the third one.

This UCP government has proven to be more antidemocratic than anyone in Alberta's history, specifically how it operates within the Legislature. As I speak to this bill, Madam Speaker, I can't stop thinking of a poem, *Someone Has Issued an Order*.

Someone has issued an order
That all the winds
Must always announce, before they blow,
In which direction they intend to travel,
Where they are heading.
The winds must also declare
At what speed they intend to blow.
The winds are no longer permitted
To become storms.
Storms are no longer allowed.
For all these walls of sand,
These palaces of paper
That we are building,
Must be protected at all costs.
And storms,
As everyone knows,
Have always been their enemies.
Someone has issued an order
To the waves of the river:
They must restrain their defiance,
They must remain within their limits.
To rise, then fall,
To scatter, then rise again—
Such commotion is unacceptable.
It is a sign of wildness,
A sign of rebellion.
And rebellion will not be tolerated.
Such wildness will not be tolerated.
If the waves wish to remain in the river,
They must learn
To flow quietly, without protest.
Someone has issued an order.
In this garden,
Only flowers of a single colour
Shall be allowed to bloom.
There will be officials
Who will decide
What tomorrow's garden should look like.
Certainly, all the flowers
Must be of the same colour.
But how deep that colour should be,
How pale or bright that colour should be,
The officials will decide.
But who will tell them?
Who will explain
That nowhere in any garden
Do flowers truly have just one colour?
They never have.
They never can.
For hidden within every colour
Live a hundred other colours.
Look at those
Who dreamed of creating
A garden of just one colour.
Now that a hundred colours
Have emerged from within that single shade,
See how troubled they are,
How frustrated,
How restless they have become.
But who will tell them?
Who will explain
That winds and waves
Have never obeyed anyone's orders?
The winds cannot be held
In the fists of rulers.
They cannot be shackled,
Handcuffed,
Or imprisoned behind bars.
And when the waves are restrained,
Even the calmest river
Begins to grow restless.
And the next step
Of that restlessness—
Is a flood.

Madam Speaker, this government wants to limit the winds of force of the opposition, kill diversity, equity, and inclusion, and pave the garden and limit the waves of change. But Albertans won't be fooled by this government. They are smart. Come next election Albertans are ready to bring the waves of change, waves that will demolish the paper palace of this UCP government. We on this side of the House are ready to be that change, change where we will respect democracy, not restrict it. Change where the rule of law will prevail, not the law of the ruler. Change where people will pick their politicians, not the politicians pick their people.

Madam Speaker, Albertans are tired. They're tired of this UCP government. Albertans are tired of watching this government ramming bills through time allocation motions, cutting short opportunities for debate, ending sessions early, and refusing to pass a single private member's bill from the opposition. We have seen that this UCP government has implemented this time allocation motion 86 times.

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

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today because we are on the topic of the electoral boundaries map, that has been a frequent topic of conversation for the last 12, 18 months. It feels like it has been going on for a long time, but that is exactly what this government is trying to take away from us. It is the time that is required for us to give this particular subject its due, something that will have an impact for the next eight to 10 years. Every general election that we will be having in this province will be impacted by the map that we determine in the coming days. This government wants to limit debate on precisely that, so I am standing, of course, to oppose Government Motion 46, that is seeking to time allocate this very important debate.

It looks opposite – when I see the folks, the members of government, it doesn't appear that they're having a great time. I'm sure that they would like for this conversation to be over. I'm sure, and I would hope that this makes many of the members opposite very uncomfortable: that they know full well that they have manipulated a process that should be transparent, unbiased, independent, objective, and fully informed by nobody else but the Albertans who put us here. They know full well that rather than respect the process, maintain the integrity of democracy, maintain the integrity of our general elections, that they simply didn't like the map, so they threw it out and created some back-of-the-napkin process to ensure that they would get the result that they were looking for. I hope this conversation makes them uncomfortable, and it is no wonder they want to rush through debate. That is why we're talking about Government Motion 46.

I don't blame them for wanting to rush through this process, Madam Speaker. It is a stain on this government, and it will be inescapable every time Albertans have to go and vote and they are reminded at just how terribly this government flubbed the entire process in a way that has never happened in Canada, in a way that

many would argue is unconstitutional, and in a way that has allowed for them to intervene in a process in which no politician should be involved. It has been a complicated process, and I don't blame.

I understand, certainly, that many Albertans have started to lose the plot because there have been so many twists and turns of this government's making, and I'm incredibly upset that maybe that is exactly by design. There was a transparent process that followed the steps that I think have been undertaken countless times in this province and in all provinces across the country. Albertans came out in the thousands, more than they ever have before, to voice their opinions on how they would like to be represented, how they want this boundaries map to be drawn. I really applaud them for that.

This is not something that, I'm sure, many people wanted to do on a Saturday afternoon, but they showed up because they know how much it matters and because somehow they continue to give this government the benefit of the doubt and trust that they will do the right thing, but they have not done the right thing, Madam Speaker. They have done the complete opposite.

They threw out what was a transparent, unbiased, independent report submitted by the majority of a commission, a majority that was nominated by both the UCP and the NDP to embark on this process with integrity and accountability and honesty. I think that this government have run out of that trust, and justifiably so. They don't deserve it anymore, Madam Speaker, because it is so blatant that they have chosen to manipulate this process simply because they didn't like the map.

4:30

Our leader has been very clear that, you know, the commission has done their job when both sides aren't entirely satisfied with the majority map. That is exactly how it's supposed to go. It's not about one side or another having partisan advantage in the next election. That is not an election of integrity, but that is precisely what this government is trying to do. I understand all the grim faces opposite who just would really like to get on with forcing through whatever next piece of legislation they have because they hold majority. That is an honest sentiment. I can understand why they feel uncomfortable.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thanks, Madam Speaker. I'm embarrassed by this government. I am embarrassed by its shameless treatment of our democracy. I'm embarrassed by this government that played a political game with our children's future and faced off with the Alberta teachers, who were looking for a better deal for classrooms and students, and then ran into this Legislature saying: we have to get the teachers back to work; let's use a notwithstanding clause. A moment when they could have sent the teachers union back with binding arbitration, they decided to take away their constitutional rights. They are shameless with their treatment of our democracy and the institutions which require decency and good treatment of each other.

Time allocation before debate is a pattern. It's a regular routine. We have now heard that they've taken it 86 times. In seven long years with this government nearly every piece of legislation that I have had an opportunity to maybe debate on, it has been introduced: "Here is a bill. We're going to allocate debate to one hour," limiting the opportunity for me to represent people in Sherwood Park and come to this place and give the perspective of people from Sherwood Park on whatever the legislation is, as bad as it is from that side. I do not get the opportunity to represent the people of Sherwood Park and bring their perspective and their voice to this Legislature. They are shameless, and it is embarrassing how they treat our democracy and the institutions that we are all voted and elected to come here and work with.

The values that we should be focusing on. We have now before us a new sham of an electoral boundaries report. This was a process that I would like to debate and have no time to debate because we're debating the opportunity for me to debate it. That's what we're debating here right now.

Just let me highlight something here from the judge's summary. He writes: in my opinion, this proposal inside is not unconstitutional. This is the highest regard he has to it. In a moment where you might say, "We think this achieves voter parity, it is fair and democratic," the report's highest value is that it's not unconstitutional in the opinion of the chair of the committee. We should be shooting for voter parity in this House. We should be seeking to have fair and open democracy. Fairness, democratic, equal: these are values that we should bring to this House. Instead, not unconstitutional is the best that we can achieve.

There are other jokes in this book. I mean, when they discuss a riding, they actually say that in this riding it's 47,000, 12 per cent, below the standard expected. But that's okay. We think that there will be growth in this county, near the Meta AI data centre. They actually believe that there's going to be an increase in population in the area of the county where they're putting a hyperscale data centre.

This UCP is so focused on gerrymandering that it is the topic of conversation for the Tim Hortons coffee crowd. I went in yesterday morning, they saw me, and they said: "What's going on with gerrymandering? What are the UCP doing now?" It is the focus of Albertans because they know they are being cheated. They're being cheated by the UCP, who are unwilling to actually do what matters. The UCP are so focused on getting deals for their insider friends, trying to create legislation so they can re-elect their friends, and not focusing on making an affordable Alberta, which is what we should all be focused on, making an affordable Alberta, an Alberta where we have a healthy society, an Alberta where our kids can grow up.

You know, Madam Speaker, last night and yesterday we saw the results of the U.S. election, and the American people voted for Democrats. They voted for Democrats in the state Legislatures. They voted for them in their House of Representatives and in their Senate. They chose a government and governments that will focus on what's important to them; affordability, health care, a good future for their children.

This government over here, these UCP that like to go down and cozy up with Trump, they better learn to speak New Democrat and quick because when they're going to try to have trade deals with the U.S., they're going to be speaking about the wrong language. They're going to be talking about gerrymandering and MAGA ideas that they can copy and paste from the U.S. friends. They better just learn to speak New Democrat because that is the language of the U.S. That is the language of people that want to make sure . . .

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

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I don't have much time, but I want to highlight some comments made by the Justice minister not only two days ago, where he said that every member of the Assembly will have the opportunity to review the report and – here's the kicker – then weigh in on it, and now we have a limit on debate again in this Chamber.

Madam Speaker, you know what? This is such an egregious proposition that I will represent the third-largest urban riding in this province, 8,053 more than the average, and we're seeing a split-up of the third-largest city in this province, Lethbridge, including two

First Nations. This First Nation representation goes against section 14(b) of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act.

Last night I heard something very important, and I want to quote it. Two thousand years ago, when the people at the top . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing Order 21 I must now put the question.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 46 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:37 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

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

Totals: For – 45 Against – 36

[Government Motion 46 carried]

Electoral Boundaries
(continued)

45. Mr. Amery moved:
    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 Government Motion 37;
    B. and be it further resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce a bill to establish new electoral divisions for Alberta in accordance with the proposals of the independent advisory panel.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

4:50

Mrs. Johnson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak in support of the independent advisory panel's report on Alberta's electoral boundaries. Section 3 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees Canadians the right to vote. The courts have long recognized that this right includes the right to effective representation. That principle has been central to Alberta's electoral boundary review process from the beginning.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, when the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission released its final report, it highlighted the extraordinary population growth Alberta has experienced. More than 800,000 additional Albertans now call this province home. The majority of the commission acknowledged the challenges created by this growth. They noted the difficulties associated with maintaining effective representation in a rapidly growing province and expressed the view that had additional seats been available, a different outcome may have been possible. Those observations formed an important part of the broader discussion about how effective representation can be maintained as Alberta continues to grow and to evolve.

Following the commission's report, an independent advisory panel was established to undertake further review. That panel was given a clear mandate. It was required to consider effective representation and to weigh factors that have guided redistribution exercises for decades, including communities of interest, geography, transportation networks, population growth, and the need for clear and understandable boundaries. Most importantly, the work remained independent. The panel was tasked with conducting its review and reporting its conclusions independently. The report now before the Assembly reflects the conclusions reached by that independent process.

Mr. Speaker, electoral boundary reviews are undertaken to respond to changing populations and changing communities. Population growth does not occur evenly across the province. Communities evolve. Municipal boundaries expand. New population centres emerge. As those changes occur, maintaining effective representation requires careful consideration of geography, communities of interest, transportation networks, and population distribution.

One issue that has received significant attention throughout this process is the existence of constituencies that include both urban and rural communities. Some commentary has suggested that these types of constituencies are unusual. They are not. They have existed under previous electoral maps. They exist right now in our province in ridings such as Airdrie-Cochrane, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, Cypress-Medicine Hat, and Strathcona-Sherwood Park. Mr. Speaker, the commission wrote that hybrid ridings are "more common . . . and will become more common due to the population growth, expansion of urban areas, the size of a Legislature that grows slowly, and the challenges of taking electoral divisions away from rural Alberta."

Justice O'Ferrall included other comments from the commission about hybrid ridings, too, including: "For some time, hybrids have been a necessity for smaller cities and [towns] to achieve effective representation." One more quote: "Currently, high population growth in the major cities along with the change in the Act has made the option of hybrids available and necessary province-wide." Not only did the commission write about them, Mr. Speaker, but they created over a dozen hybrid ridings in their report, including four in Calgary and two in Edmonton.

As Justice O'Ferrall wrote in the independent advisory panel: "The minority's criticism of the panel's proposed hybrids can be summarized in two sentences. The Commission's hybrids are fine. The advisory panels are not." Given the independent advisory panel's process used the same information the commission had and followed the same rules, it makes one wonder what's behind the opposition's sudden reversal on hybrids, Mr. Speaker.

Alberta is unique in many ways, but the existence of similar constituencies can be found in jurisdictions across Canada. B.C. just held an election, and roughly 16 to 20 of their 93 seats could be classified as hybrid. Quebec also had a recent election, and roughly 18 to 22 of their 127 seats could be classified as hybrid.

Effective representation has never required every constituency to fit neatly within a single category. Rather, the focus has always been on whether electoral boundaries reflect the realities of the communities they represent and whether Albertans can be effectively served by their elected representatives. In fact, hybrid constituencies recognize how communities interact, connect, and function in practice.

More importantly, effective representation has never required constituencies to fit neatly into a single category. Many Albertan communities have strong connections across municipal boundaries. People commute between communities for work. They access shared health care services. They attend the same schools and post-secondary institutions. They participate in regional economies and transportation networks that don't stop at the edge of their city or town.

The reality is that Alberta's growth has increasingly blurred traditional distinctions in many parts of the province. Communities once viewed as entirely rural may now be closely connected to nearby urban centres. Growing municipalities are increasingly linked through shared infrastructure, labour markets, and economic activity. In that environment the fact that a constituency contains both urban and rural communities doesn't necessarily detract from effective representation. In some circumstances it may actually reflect how communities function in practice.

Ultimately, the question isn't whether every constituency fits within a perfect or particular label. Mr. Speaker, the question is whether the overall map provides Albertans with effective representation while respecting communities of interest and maintaining reasonable population balance. That's the standard established by the courts. That's the standard that guided the Electoral Boundaries Commission. That's the standard that guided the independent advisory panel, and that's the standard that should guide consideration of this report.

Mr. Speaker, reasonable people may disagree about individual boundaries. They may disagree about whether a particular community should be included in one constituency or another. Those debates are inevitable. What should not be lost, however, is the broader context. This process began with an independent commission responding to unprecedented population growth. It continued through an independent advisory panel tasked with examining how representation could be strengthened. Throughout that process effective representation remained the guiding principle.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: I will recognize the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Voters should pick their politicians, not politicians their voters. That is what we are here to argue about today. We are faced with a motion on the basis of a UCP panel report that is the result of bad process, bad arguments, and bad outcomes. I will go into each one of them, but, Mr. Speaker, this is about the rights of Albertans. That's what's being violated here today. Not just any right; the right to vote.

The UCP normally stand up in this place and tell us that they can throw out people's rights because democracy, that democracy is more important than rights. We have pointed out multiple times that the right to vote, the right to democracy, is itself a right, and if they have no respect for rights, they have no respect for democracy either. What we see before us today is clear evidence of exactly that.

Mr. Stephan: Referendums.

Ms Ganley: Yes. You did ram referendums down people's throats to the tune of many, many hundreds of millions of dollars. I don't know why you think that's a point in your favour. [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, the broader context of this . . .

The Acting Speaker: Order. Order.

Please, through the chair. Comments through the chair.

Ms Ganley: Well, perhaps the member strictly should also go through the chair.

The Acting Speaker: Comments will come through the chair. Heckling does not come through the chair. I will ask all members of the Assembly to ensure that they keep their comments to themselves as much as possible.

We have one member that is recognized, and that is the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, and she will recognize that comments come through the chair.

5:00

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do think that it is very important for all members to be governed by the same set of rules.

The broader context on this issue is that the UCP have thrown out the voices of Albertans. The commission, in doing its work, consulted with – they received hundreds of oral presentations and over a thousand written submissions. That was a lot of Albertans having a chance to have input. The process consulted Albertans, drew maps on that basis, and then went back and reconsulted on those. That is what results in good maps. The process we have before us today, the UCP process, had no consultation with Albertans, and, Mr. Speaker, boy, does it show, in the arguments especially.

I think it's worth talking about this idea of hybrids, and I submitted, as did many, many Albertans extensively, on this issue. The point of democracy, I think it's worth noting, is for the debate to occur here in this place, in the Legislature. Representative democracy involves people choosing their representatives and sending them here to debate their different interests. This view that members opposite have that we should put all sorts of different views together, especially in light of the hotness of issues like separatism, and have the MLA essentially sit as judge and decide which submission should make it to this Chamber undercuts representative democracy. That's not how the system is supposed to work. And the legislation recognizes that and had previously recognized it more by explicitly stating that communities of interest should be kept together so that their interests could be brought here to be adjudicated. It is not for an MLA to sit in judgment of their constituents and try to represent wildly different interests. That's not what the system is meant to do because, again, it's not about the MLA. It's about the people.

The history of this matter is that it commenced with the UCP bringing in legislation, legislation that both removed municipal boundaries as a relevant consideration, foreshadowing what they were about to do, but also which picked 89 seats. I think this has gotten lost in this debate, but 89 seats is a number the UCP picked. They could have picked any number. They ram things through this

House over our objections all the time. If they had wanted 91, that was entirely open to them.

Then we have the commission. The commission, as I said, did extensive consultations, and when we get the interim maps, which, I might add, is a report in which everyone agrees, all sides, suddenly we see these particular submissions coming before the commission, one of which someone failed to remove the government watermark from the document. So we know where they came from. This wasn't random; it was targeted. Then we see the UCP minority of the commission do a sudden left turn. They come back with a set of maps. We don't know how they were drawn, how they were created. Some of them are represented, like, for instance, Red Deer, literally nowhere in the record. No one suggested this. It just fell out of the clear, blue sky one day into the minority's lap. That is very problematic. Although some of them, interestingly, also mirror the submissions where someone forgot to remove the government watermark. So that is – I mean, it's confusing. It's a confusing state of facts, and maybe on its own it doesn't mean something, but it is paired with a lot of different things.

So then we get this minority report. We get a majority report, and now we have the UCP running around and claiming that their appointee, their chair, was an NDP partisan, which is (a) transparently not true. He had a job to do. The thing is that sometimes people have a greater commitment to justice than they have to partisanship, and that is what happened in this case. He had a job to do and he did it. He was bound by the record. He considered himself to be bound by the record; you know, the things that the people of Alberta had to say, that they came in and argued before the panel. The UCP obviously does not feel themselves similarly bound, but this isn't what NDP people do; it's what judges do. Caring about justice, about ethics, about integrity: sure, they're NDP values, but they're not just NDP values, and it's a little weird to me that the members opposite would try to argue that only we believe in those things, but there we are.

Then we get the addendum from the justice. You can have multiple opinions on it. It is not part of the majority. I think that that is the critical point. The majority put in maps. The right thing to do is to pass those maps. The addendum is an addendum. What's really crucial to pull out of this is Justice Miller saying: I make these recommendations alone. Despite the rhetoric coming from the other side, this was a recommendation of one member. It also very specifically and explicitly, again, in the language says not to touch anything south of Airdrie.

Then we get a government motion based on that addendum. Again, I don't think that's good, but it gets much worse from there. The Premier and the Minister of Justice and many others stood up multiple times in this House and said that they were just doing addendum 5, that they were only inserting two rural seats. That is not what we see before us today. Not only have they impacted things south of Airdrie, contrary to explicit instructions; they have inserted three rural seats. Two is not three. I think that's an argument that most people – this is a complicated process and the UCP are absolutely doing their best to obfuscate it because they don't want the public to see what's happening here, but I think everyone understands that two and three are not the same thing.

Now we get these maps, and I think what's really important about them is that the reasoning is incredibly strained. Incredibly strained. They're like: in order to achieve this, we have to do that. Okay, but you didn't need to achieve the first thing, right? Like, that's the thing you made up in the first place based on a mere assertion. One of the best examples of this is Cochrane. There is a mere assertion that Cochrane, despite the fact that they don't do this to other smaller municipalities that are in larger ridings, must be on its own. Springbank can't possibly go to Cochrane. They have nothing in common.

We see them talk disparagingly about a number of ridings. I think, for instance, they have knock-on consequences in what they do for the riding of Banff-Kananaskis, and they refer to the constituents there in Canmore and Banff as luxury vacation homes, which I think is deeply unfair and offensive to those people.

Cochrane, for some reason, is the only municipality that needs to be by itself; therefore, Springbank must be removed. That takes Cochrane from 9 per cent below to 13 per cent below. So it was already below and now it's even lower. No justification, and then it needs to be split into two to go into the Calgary ridings. You didn't need to do it in the first place. It's absurd. The entire thing from beginning to end is totally absurd. It does have the interesting collateral impact of protecting some UCP cabinet ministers, though.

In Lethbridge we see the same thing. There was no reason to do anything to Lethbridge. They could have just left it alone, but then they have to borrow the "spare" – and that's their word; again, very disrespectful language when we're talking about the people whose rights we're supposed to be respecting – and put into the surrounding county. Lethbridge submitted 5 to 1 against this. Five to 1. The people of Lethbridge did not want this. Again, the interesting side effect of the borrowing of this spare population, who did not want to be borrowed and should be considered to be people with rights, is that one UCP cabinet minister is protected, and two more don't have to run against each other in a nomination. Again, when you see an argument with incredibly strained reasoning that merely asserts and does not argue, you have to wonder what the actual reason is, and I think it's pretty clear.

I also want to talk a little bit about one of the things that is most worrying to me. One of the things we have in this report is this section that talks about northeast Calgary and the growth in northeast Calgary. It's true that there is significant growth in northeast Calgary. Weirdly, the section cites the ridings of Calgary-Cross, Calgary-Klein, Calgary-East, and the new riding of Calgary-Confluence. Only one of those ridings is entirely located in the northeast of Calgary. One spans northeast and northwest, one is entirely southeast, and one is northeast and southeast. So a weird argument to begin with.

5:10

Then it argues that a subcommittee should consider just this one section to have a four-seat solution before the next boundary. I don't know what the other proposed solutions were. It doesn't say in the report. They didn't take public submissions. We don't know where this information came from. And it's only signed by the two UCP panel members. The chair does not sign this. We don't know, again, why. No idea why.

Then in the introduction suddenly, despite the fact that that's not what was argued for in the section, the Legislature should maybe consider it. That's a real problem. That's literally politicians choosing their voters. I'm really worried about what is going to happen with this legislation because that is just absurd. And I might add that the two members who sign it are almost apologetic, saying: oh, we would have done something else about this except the argument reached us late. Reached them from where? Where did the argument reach them from? There were no submissions before this panel. Again, we don't know. We are left to speculate, and I have to say, Mr. Speaker, the speculation is not good because there was no problem being solved. Like, who raised the problem? What was the problem? Anyway, I think this is a significant problem.

I also want to point out that what is done here – and the minority does a very good job of this, so I'm going to read a few quotes.

> Most of our colleagues' proposed boundaries were also clearly opposed by the vast majority of submissions that the ABEBC . . .

That's the commission.

> . . . received. While we take it that our colleagues genuinely believe that this is in the best interests of creating the most effective representation . . . the consequence is partisan outcomes that they either ignore or favour.

That's problematic.

I also want to quote what they said when they're talking about the knock-on changes from Lethbridge and the way they affect Banff and Canmore.

> These changes not only do not facilitate effective representation, but actively undermine it. They have ignored the overwhelming desire of Lethbridge residents to have two mostly urban electoral divisions. They have systematically diluted the weight of Lethbridge residents by unnecessarily placing them in electoral divisions that extend . . . hundreds of kilometres.

I'm sorry. That comment was actually specific to Lethbridge. There was a different comment about knock-on consequences.

The Acting Speaker: I recognize the Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising on Government Motion 45, which is currently – there's only a single hour left of debate. A chunk of it has already been gone. I want to really quickly get onto the record some of the key points about this debate and, of course, my extreme disappointment that not all of my colleagues in this Chamber will be able to even have comment on Government Motion 45, something that's fundamental to our democracy, fundamental to Albertans, and something that, I will say with certainty, all members of the Official Opposition have very strong opinions on and would like to speak to. I cannot speak for government members who have supported the time allocation on this motion.

Now, I had the opportunity to speak very briefly, for five minutes, during the time allocation, and I just want to return to some of those comments that I was making. Specifically, I want to be very clear. To get to this process, there was an appropriately structured boundaries commission that was created. It returned a majority report. In all previous cases where a majority report has been returned from a boundary commission, the Alberta government accepts that report and we move on. Whether that's Conservative or New Democrat, it is the normal process.

Instead of adopting the majority report from their commission, this government has invented a new process, that they called Government Motion 37, and spun us off into an entirely different process which they now claim is independent, but I can assure you and Albertans that it absolutely is not, nor is it appropriate, nor should this Chamber be talking about adopting the maps that came out of that process. The government should have accepted the majority report from the commission.

The government still should accept that report so that this House can move on, so that all Albertans can have some faith in what is happening because the undermining of our democracy, the undermining of that trust is incredibly real. As my colleagues have described, I have also had many people approaching me in the short time that this has been happening to talk about their concerns that the government is doing everything they can to take away their voice and to ensure that the government stays in power forever.

Now, if not the best and right thing of accepting the original commission's majority report, potentially the second-best thing is that the government could and should have done what they said they were going to do, which is follow Justice Miller's recommendation 5, which allowed for the addition of two new rural seats, moving us to a 91-seat map and not making any changes south of Airdrie. What we have here is the opposite of that.

This map in front of us from the panel makes significant changes south of Airdrie, including clear evidence of gerrymandering in Calgary and in Lethbridge. In Lethbridge we see the U.S. Republican-style technique of packing and cracking being applied, where they put an overstuffed riding with their opponent's voters – in this case it's the Official Opposition – and then splitting off, cracking into three other rural areas roughly 40 per cent of Lethbridge's population in votes.

If at the very least the government had followed the addendum to the majority report, which, to be clear, they indicated multiple times and in multiple places they were going to do – I read a media quote from the Premier earlier. I will read now in this House that the Premier said on April 21 that

> the independent committee is going to then hire . . . a new commission, and it will be the new commission that will take the direction from this Legislature, which includes looking at the majority report as the base, with . . . modifications proposed by the judge in his addendum, and they will come up with a conclusion about what that should look like by the fall, and then we will have an opportunity to debate it here.

She goes on to say in multiple different places that they intended to follow Justice Miller's recommendations, and that's not what we have.

Again, the government should go back to the original commission, the only real commission in this process, rather than what we've seen. In that original commission I will just say that a historic number of Albertans participated. Their secret new panel process – we cannot call it a commission; that's not what it was – didn't talk to a single Albertan except for in the instances my colleague has already begun to describe, the places where it seems like they were talking to somebody and we don't know who.

Now, I had the opportunity to sit on the legislative committee that was set up around this, and I want to talk about some of the strange things that we saw sitting on that committee that continue to disenfranchise Albertans, that are deeply disrespectful to Albertans who are going to be impacted by these maps, especially when there was a transparently run, correctly formulated commission that we could be talking about. When the government invented this new process instead of accepting the majority, getting clarity on exactly what it meant and how it would work was very difficult. At the very first meeting the chair could not or would not confirm either just by telling us or by passing some of the motions that we proposed that recommendation 5, the judge's addendum, would be followed. They refused to substantively debate that motion, would not pass it. Outside to the media the chair then suggested: oh, yeah; it'll all be followed, recommendation 5, absolutely. In the end, we see it absolutely was not, so that is not correct.

5:20

In the committee process we talked about how we were going to be appointing people to this new panel. Specifically we put forward motions to prevent somebody with a partisan donation history. We asked for sitting judges to be considered because a sitting judge has a particular responsibility to be neutral and nonpartisan, which is different from someone who is retired, who can obviously engage in politics. Every motion that we put forward to incorporate donation history, to try to appoint someone who isn't a retired judge, or otherwise improve the transparency and process was rejected by this government. In the end, all three of the people that they appointed, including the judge, had partisan donation histories, and we've now learned from public reporting that one of their panel members donated while he was a panellist on this whole process.

Now, normally in the course of how things work under the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act,

> when properly constituted commissions are established, the protocol has always been that the Chief Justice of Alberta be

> consulted for advice in respect of presently sitting or retired judges who may wish to offer themselves to accept the role. This convention should be respected with regard to any commissions appointed under that Act.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I am reading from a letter that we got from the Acting Chief Justice when the committee reached out to say that we're going to be looking for justices to help on this incredibly fundamental piece of our democracy. The chief justices wrote back and said: "Given . . . the irregularity of this process, the Courts will refrain from disseminating your . . . letter or providing any input on the selection of Chair."

Normally on a commission we work with the Acting Chief Justice. There's a bit of a negotiation and an idea of what we're looking for and finding the best people. That didn't happen here because the Acting Chief Justice declined to participate, and following that, the Canadian Bar Association declined to participate. In the end, I believe we had a single applicant. The retired justice with a partisan donation history was the one who was then brought on to chair this process.

I truly am mostly concerned, Mr. Speaker, about the fact that every attempt at transparency, every attempt to try and shine a light on what is happening, every attempt to try to get the government to hold to standard norms throughout this was rejected. Earlier I introduced a couple of our staff who worked on the committee work. More than 30 motions that the Official Opposition put forward, almost none of them debated with any substance, and none of them passed to add any kind of transparency.

Another concerning and strange thing that I think breaks some of the trust we have in this process was that the panel asked for the ability to hire on some experts, and there were some serious concerns about why, particularly when they asked for a pollster with experience in voting behaviour. Why was the panel interested in the voting behaviour of Albertans as they tried to redraw the boundaries? A completely inappropriate request for which we never got any answers, even in our final meeting when we tried to ask: "Okay. The panel's work is done. Now tell us. Who did they talk to? Who did they hire? Can we find out what advice they got?" Again the government members on that committee would not debate, would not work with us in any way, and in the end voted down our attempts.

I find it incredibly suspect that the government is trying to frame this as something entirely reasonable when they had within their power so many other ways they could have gone about this. After the unanimous interim report of the original commission came through would have been a perfect time to adjust the seat count and allow the commission to go back out and talk to Albertans about that change, but they did not do that. Instead, the secret panel process was undertaken that spoke, we think, to no one, but we have no way of confirming that. As my colleague read from the minority report, and I will quote from page 2, "The consequence is partisan outcomes that they either ignore or favour," they being the UCP-appointed members of the panel. It's incredibly – incredibly – frustrating.

Now, there are a few things that I've already touched on that I just want to emphasize. The UCP appointees to this panel and the report that we have in front of us absolutely exceeded the mandates. The mandate said no changes south of Airdrie. Instead of following that recommendation – something that, again, the Premier and the Justice minister said multiple times in this House, in media would be followed, was generally the expectation – the report does the exact opposite. And the changes in Calgary and Lethbridge can all be linked to benefiting UCP cabinet ministers.

In the end, instead of adding only two rural ridings, we see a report that adds three because they've taken away an urban riding in Lethbridge and created a new rural riding there, again, in an area that should never have been in consideration. They changed ridings they shouldn't have with absolutely no good explanation except for partisan political advantage for the UCP, and that is a paraphrase from the minority report. "There is [absolutely] no precedent for the redrawing of the entirety of a [provincial map] after an independent commission has completed that task in at least the past three decades of Canadian history." I quote that from the minority report as well, page 6, paragraph 18.

The fact that the panel saw fit to completely exceed its mandate has led us to my second point, which is that the panel's UCP-appointed majority when they were redrawing the electoral boundaries, including those in Calgary and Lethbridge, did that in ways that likely violate the Charter. When I say "violate the Charter," we're talking about section 3, the right to vote, a right that is guaranteed to all Albertans and to all Canadians, a right that protects their right to effective representation. Effective representation is something that has been canvassed through multiple court applications, including to the Supreme Court, and we have a good general understanding of.

Section 3 cannot be overwritten by the notwithstanding clause. I think that's really important to understand because what we have in front of us is constitutionally precarious, very likely unconstitutional, and we need to be very aware of that because no political party should ever be able to infringe upon the rights which hold them accountable. Again, as my colleagues have said, voters should pick the politicians; politicians should not pick the voters. It's incredibly important.

The panel's UCP-appointed majority – and this is my third and final point that I will make now – dilutes the voter parity and does it in a way that's extremely challenging and likely unconstitutional. We know that the new map ridings that have been put forward by the panel in Edmonton and Calgary would have about 7,000 more people on average than the ridings outside of those cities. The trend of getting closer to voter parity is one that we've undertaken for decades. In the original majority it was going to be shifting back a little bit. This panel report makes it completely worse.

There are so many reasons to vote against this.

The Acting Speaker: I recognize the Member for Lethbridge-West.

Member Miyashiro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to oppose Government Motion 45 for the same reasons for the past year I've spoken against this government's efforts to gerrymander Lethbridge. It's like Groundhog Day around here.

You've heard me talk about the importance of representation when drawing constituency boundaries, and you've heard me speak about keeping communities intact, but you've never heard me speak about golf courses. Wait, wait, wait. What is that, you ask? Well, I'll tell you what. Golf courses are mentioned at least 12 times in the sham UCP boundaries report. I didn't realize golf courses were a metric for measuring representation or community, but there you have it, a UCP-induced alternate reality. Ironically, the UCP has moved Henderson Lake Golf Course, which opened in 1917 and is one of five golf courses in Lethbridge, to Taber. I guess what's good for the golf isn't good for the gander.

5:30

Mr. Speaker, rather than hearing more from me – and believe me, I could speak on this for a long time more – let's hear from some Lethbridge and area residents, taken from over 200 messages my office has received since Monday. Tony in Lethbridge-East wrote to the Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services:

> I write this letter in objection to the unfair and inappropriate manner in which the new commission appointed by your government has set electoral boundaries. Mixing urban and rural ridings denies appropriate local issues, issue-based representation from both urban and rural voters. It's not lost on many Albertans that this will

unfairly provide advantage for your own party. Personally, as a constituent of Lethbridge-East I object to being lost in the rural riding of Taber-Warner. This constituency does not represent me fairly.

Tania in Lethbridge-East wrote:

I am writing to express my profound opposition to the grotesque gerrymandering imposed on Lethbridge-East. What should be an impartial, transparent process to protect fair, democratic representation has instead been reduced to a partisan exercise in political self-preservation. The newly carved boundaries defy geographic logic, shatter national community cohesion, and completely ignore the shared socioeconomic realities of local residents. Gerrymandering of this nature is not merely bad administrative planning; it's a calculated attempt to dilute votes, engineer outcomes, and disenfranchise an entire constituency. When electoral lines are drawn to serve political power rather than the electorate, the fundamental integrity of our electoral system is compromised. And relying on artificial boundary shifts to shield representatives from accountability reflects a deep contempt for the democratic process. Voters deserve to choose their representatives in competitive representative ridings, not to have representatives choose their voters behind closed doors.

Greg from Taber-Warner wrote:

As a conservative I believe governments must be held to the same standards they expect of others. I would strongly oppose this approach if undertaken by an NDP government, and I cannot justify it simply because a Conservative government is in power. I ask every MLA one straightforward question: would you support these same boundaries and the same process if another political party were governing Alberta? Conservatism should stand for principled leadership, fiscal responsibility, fairness, and respect for democratic institutions, not appear to be changing the rules when politically convenient.

Andrew in Lethbridge-West wrote:

Contrary to the views of the Premier, hybrid ridings do not serve anyone well. Lethbridge citizens need representation for our issues that are completely different from surrounding communities. Why would people in Warner care about the University of Lethbridge? Why should people in Lethbridge care about roadworks on highways 4 and 5? How does an MLA in my area effectively advocate for my son's school in Lethbridge and those in small rural communities when those school districts deal with completely different issues? Nothing of this plan makes sense, and it does not represent the needs and concerns of Lethbridge or surrounding communities effectively. And a special thank you to the UCP for wasting more of my tax dollars on yet another lawsuit as you fight gerrymandering in the court system. This is not fiscally or socially responsible leadership.

Alyssa in Lethbridge-East wrote to the Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services:

I'm writing this e-mail to you to express my frustration and disappointment in your party's decision to change the electoral boundaries in Alberta. As a resident of Lethbridge this is extremely concerning because it splits our city into four ridings connected to small towns around us. For me, this connects me to towns like Raymond, Cardston, et cetera. I know that our needs in Lethbridge are very different. It's unfair to both the residents of Lethbridge and to the surrounding towns to have our needs lumped together. We deserve to have our own ridings that allow us to elect someone that matches our own unique needs of our locations. I'm also frustrated because this is clearly gerrymandering. It appears that your party would rather plow through this decision than accept the boundaries from the independent body who created them. You should be brave enough to earn the vote of urban voters rather than rig the map for your own benefit.

Amber in Lethbridge-West wrote:

I wrote to the original Electoral Boundaries Commission when it was open for public feedback about why I felt it was important to preserve the urban representation of Lethbridge residents. I disagree with the cockamamie idea of effective representation. It's effective something, but it's not representative. I've written so many damn letters. I'm tired of feeling attacked by this government. I think they want us tired and ready to give up, honestly. I think they like it.

They like taking away rights and representation of actual people and fairness and justice. They seem to thrive on it and the division it creates in the province, one where I was born, raised rural, by the way, educated, and lived for most of my life. I don't even recognize it anymore. My stance, just so I'm clear: I'm against these electoral boundary changes to Lethbridge. I view it as a blatant, cowardly, . . .

Unparliamentary word. Sorry; I can't say it.

Kathy in Taber-Warner wrote:

I was once a UCP voter. I supported the party in the past, but I have not voted UCP since Jason Kenney's leadership. Over the years I've become increasingly disillusioned with a government that, in my view, has grown self-serving, dismissive of legitimate public concerns, and increasingly disconnected from the Albertans it was elected to represent. This issue has only reinforced those concerns. I do not believe any political party, regardless of its majority in the Legislature, should treat electoral representation as something to be determined without meaningful public scrutiny and consultation.

Connie in Lethbridge-West wrote the Premier:

I find it almost comical that the underlying assumption appears to be that I as a resident of Lethbridge would have more in common with someone living in Cardston or Picture Butte with respect to provincial issues and political representation than I would with someone who lives two doors down from me in my own community. The suggestion that geographically and socially distinct communities should be artificially grouped while neighbours within the same city are separated raises serious questions about the principles guiding these decisions.

More concerning, however, is the apparent disregard for the democratic process itself. An independent committee was established to assess electoral boundaries and provide recommendations based on its mandate and established principles. Rejecting that independent work in favour of a government-drawn map that appears to offer clear electoral advantages to the governing party is an affront to the very purpose of having an independent boundaries commission in the first place. It's difficult not to view this as an attempt to manipulate the electoral landscape for the political gain at the expense of voters' interests. I consider this an unacceptable interference with the integrity of our democratic institutions and an erosion of the public's confidence in fair representation.

I'm also deeply troubled by the implications for the relative voting power of urban Albertans. Urban constituencies tend to represent substantially larger populations than many rural constituencies. As a result, urban voters are already afforded less individual representation, proportionally speaking, than their rural counterparts. Why, then, does this government believe that my vote should now be worth even less? Why should an Albertan living within an urban boundary have to accept an additional dilution of their political voice simply because of where they live? Democracy depends on more than the ability to cast a ballot. It depends on the assurance that every ballot carries a fair and meaningful voice. I am profoundly disappointed that this government appears to be willing to compromise that principle in order to try to make sure the UCP stays in power.

JoAnne from Lethbridge-West wrote:

This is the first time I'm writing about anything political, but this proposed realignment of Lethbridge into four ridings is ridiculous. Please note that I'm from a farming background in Saskatchewan and know what happens when urban and rural ridings get mixed together into one riding. There are clashing interests all the time. My subdivision will now be part of Lethbridge-Cardston. If an MLA is elected and they're from Cardston, how can they represent this part of the city's urban concerns? The same can be said if an MLA is

elected from the city. How can they represent a rural community if they have no knowledge or understanding of farming? Why is Lethbridge being targeted because of our agricultural background? Red Deer also has an agricultural background with similar population to Lethbridge, but Red Deer is not being split into four ways.

Gloria in Lethbridge-West wrote:

Politically motivated changes to our electoral map are unacceptable. Uphold the boundaries recommended in the original majority report and protect fair representation for Lethbridge and communities across Alberta.

Jessica from Lethbridge-East wrote:

I do not appreciate what appears to be a clear attempt to gerrymander our district. Electoral boundaries must be established by an independent, nonpartisan commission to ensure fair representation for all constituents. The current proposal comes across as an overt attempt to dilute left-leaning voices. Pretending that the citizens of Lethbridge centre share the exact same priorities and concerns as rural farmers is frankly ludicrous. While both urban and rural populations are vital to our province, our day-to-day needs, infrastructure requirements, and policy priorities are distinctly different and require focused, accurate representation. There is no for-the-people reason for this districting to occur.

5:40

Tom from Lethbridge-West wrote to the Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services as well as the Premier:

An urban municipality like Lethbridge faces specific, localized challenges, including dense infrastructure needs, postsecondary institutional support, specialized urban health care, public transit, and concentrated social services. These priorities require focused representation from an MLA who understands urban dynamics. Blending our urban neighbours into a massive rural swath dilutes our ability to advocate effectively for the distinct needs of our city.

Equally concerning is the disservice this proposal does to our rural neighbours. Southern Alberta's agricultural communities have unique, crucial priorities such as water rights, rural irrigation systems, agricultural supply chains, and the maintenance of vast rural infrastructure. Expecting a single MLA to effectively balance and advocate for the conflicting priorities of a condensed urban core and a sprawling rural district spanning hundreds of kilometres is entirely unrealistic. One set of interests will inevitably overshadow the other.

Electoral boundaries should bring communities of interest together, not divide a cohesive city to create unmanageable hybrid regions. This layout erodes the principle of effective representation for all constituents involved. Given that your party holds a majority in the Legislature, you have a distinct responsibility to ensure that governance serves the best interests of your constituents. I urge you to listen to the serious concerns being raised in Lethbridge and speak out against this dilution of our representation and vote against the adoption of these deeply flawed boundaries.

Jody from Lethbridge-West sent a message to the Premier.

I'm a voter in Lethbridge-West, and should the boundaries be changed to what you release maps of, I will lose my fair representation. As a municipal and provincial taxpayer and a proud Albertan I have the right to proper representation. You claim to stand up for Albertans. I cannot think of an advantage to me or any other voter for these boundaries. The only benefit I see is to your party, not to the average Albertan. If these go through, an MLA will have to choose between the needs of rural communities versus our city when bringing laws to the Legislature. The rural communities deserve their own voices, too.

Megan from Lethbridge-West wrote:

As with so many decisions made under this government, there appears to be little consideration for the broader public good. The proposed changes to Alberta's electoral map are yet another example of a government that seems more interested in serving itself and its supporters than representing the interests of Albertans. There are no clear or compelling reasons in the public interest to justify moving the existing electoral boundaries. Instead, the proposed changes appear to shift electoral advantage toward the UCP in future elections.

How the diluted representation of voters in communities such as west Lethbridge and east Cardston is supposed to serve their interests is difficult to rationally explain. These changes only further demonstrate how inappropriate and concerning this apparent gerrymandering has become. Whether it's the Premier's use of pretentious town halls, predetermined surveys, the invocation of the notwithstanding clause, the disastrous referendum process, or the systematic dismantling of public services in this province, there's a troubling pattern emerging. This government continues to disregard established conventions, credible evidence, and the expressed concerns and wishes of Albertans. The proposed electoral boundaries are simply just another example of that pattern.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier and 24 cabinet ministers walk into a bar – I mean, walk into the cabinet room. Four of them look at each other and are worried about where they're going to run because, clearly, their current ridings don't exist anymore. All of the rest of the cabinet ministers and the Premier decide to rewrite the whole map to find ways to make sure that sitting cabinet ministers don't have to actually run and win a fair contest for a nomination.

Mr. Speaker, that is an abuse of democracy. This is absolutely unprecedented. The only other time in my lifetime and maybe longer that there has been a change in the number of seats between when the Legislature passed its first set of rules about what would be happening in the electoral boundary review and the second was after the first round of consultations and the first set of maps were introduced by the then Ed Stelmach government. The fair thing to do was to actually amend the legislation at that point, then do another round of consultations with the public, then come back with the actual, independent parties introducing a map that was then adopted. That's what the UCP could have done when they actually, at the first glance, saw that they had a number of cabinet ministers in rural Alberta, in particular, that were worried about where they were going to run and how they were going to win. Instead, what they did is let thousands of Albertans present in person and through written submissions, go through this whole process. They thought that they could control the three people that they appointed to be a part of this panel in getting the maps that they knew would put them in a more favourable position than others. They thought that they had everybody under control, but clearly they didn't.

The maps came back, and I want to say that it's not a great map for anyone, Mr. Speaker, but it was fair. Principles around keeping like communities together, respecting municipal boundaries wherever possible, making sure that we got closer to having one citizen's vote mean an equivalent to that of another's were some of the guiding principles. Did it go all the way? Absolutely not. Is this proposal by hand-picked UCP insiders any better? Heck, no. It's far worse.

I don't know about you, but I have faith in rural MLAs to be able to do a great job representing their constituents. Maybe it's because I grew up in rural Alberta. Maybe it's because when I was at the grocery store in Edmonton, Pearl Calahasen would recognize me and offer to give me a ride home to go and see my parents. That's what good rural MLAs can do and should do. For MLAs in this proposal to have 80 – for me to have 1.8 times the number of constituents, for example, or any other urban MLA to have 1.8 times the constituents of the Finance minister, I have more faith in the Finance minister's ability to do his job than this report gives to the people of Alberta and to the members of this very place.

Mr. Speaker, for a caucus and a cabinet that speaks about not liking DEI, holy man, have they ever gone leaps and bounds to make sure that they have DEI in place to protect their insiders, their cabinet ministers. They don't think that their cabinet ministers can fight a fair fight to make sure that they can win in their own ridings, and they're making sure that people who are a larger percentage of racialized populations in the four largest cities, a larger percentage of those who are women, who are actually seeing their voices disenfranchised through this proposal so that rural ridings, which the Premier and cabinet ministers are taking for granted, have a stronger probability of being able to elect a Conservative cabinet minister. Albertans don't buy it.

I have never heard as many people care about electoral boundaries in my life as do right now, and part of it is because we saw what happened in Texas and in other places throughout the United States. The playbook that the UCP is following is the exact MAGA playbook that was rejected last night by Americans across the country.

Mr. Speaker, trying to disenfranchise voters, trying to play games to rig the results of certain ridings is not going to work. Albertans are so much smarter than that. The people that I grew up with in Lesser Slave Lake, the people that live in Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre who see what's happening with these maps: I think taking them for granted is not wise. I think that people across this province deserve to have fair representation. Like, the fact that Edmonton has grown by 30 per cent in population since the last maps were drawn and only gets one additional seat because they're adding two but taking one away is appalling.

At the same time we're seeing rural populations declining and urban populations growing at an astronomical rate. The government is already making the decision today that they want to kneecap voters in urban centres. They want to make sure that their vote continues to become worth less and less and less over the 10 years that follow. This isn't a decision for one day. This is a decision for a decade.

Mr. Speaker, as one of the people who presented at the Electoral Boundaries Commission this time and the last time, I have to say that this is so disrespectful to every single Albertan who took time to go and make their arguments. The people of Lethbridge who showed up and 5 to 1 said: "Don't mess with our east-west divide. This has been in place for 30-plus years. We understand it, it makes sense," and the government outright ignores them and decides that they know better than the people who showed up to present. It is appalling. It is an absolute waste of taxpayer dollars and the time of the people who were asked to serve on the initial commission. To say to people, "We want you to spend your whole summer travelling this province, hearing from Albertans," and then to ignore what they have to say is disrespectful, disingenuous, and it is not fiscally responsible in any way.

I call on the members of this House to do the right thing, to vote no, and to actually stand up for free and fair elections.

The Acting Speaker: Pursuant to Government Motion 46, agreed to earlier today, which states that after one hour of debate all questions must be decided to conclude debate on Government Motion 45, I must now put the following question.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 45 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:50 p.m.]

[Five minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

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

Totals: For – 45 Against – 36

[Government Motion 45 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

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

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:58 p.m.]

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