

Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, November 18, 2026

Day 69

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 31st Legislature
Second Session

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Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
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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)
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Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
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Fir, Hon. Tanya, ECA, Calgary-Peigan (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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Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m. Wednesday, November 18, 2026

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Statement by the Speaker

Alert Ready Emergency Alert System Test

The Speaker: Hon. members, you are probably aware that the Alberta emergency alert system is scheduled to be tested across Alberta and Canada this afternoon at 1:55 p.m. during Oral Question Period. To avoid disruptions in the Chamber – and none of us want that – please leave your phones in the lounge or turn them off until after you've turned them on in the lounge so that they don't go off in the Chamber. If any do, there's not a rule, but I will certainly expect that if that happens, someone will send $50 to their favourite food bank in Alberta as a reasonable and just punishment.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: A school group today with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce 128 of some of the smartest junior high school students in all of Alberta. We've got 128 visitors from STEM Collegiate in my riding. I ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce some of the Edmonton firefighters union representatives, local 209. We have the second vice-president, Kyle Wilkinson; the treasurer, Lance Prefontaine; and the secretary, Max Rausch. I ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Chestermere-Strathmore.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From the IAFF local 5284, it's my pleasure to introduce president Kimball Yorston and vice-president Will Smith. Thank you both for being here today. I've truly appreciated the friendship over the years. Please receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Many introductions today, so let's be as brief as we can, please.

The Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to welcome two groups to the Legislature today. Joining us from Lethbridge are firefighters Brent Nunweiler, Brendon Pyne, Ryan Rae, Daryl Thompson, and Carl Mix.

Also joining us today from the Winnifred Stewart Association: Emily Ruttan, Eddie Gots, and Brookes Merritt. If they could all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise and present some other firefighters to the Legislature today. From Red Deer IAFF local 1190 Brad Readman, Mark Stadnick, and Dane Moran. As well as from Edmonton's IAFF local 209 Jay Davies, Joel Clarkson, Duncan Morris.

And one more person. If I could also please introduce Lesley Thompson, who is president of the Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview CA. If they could all stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce two of northern Alberta's finest firefighters, captain Marc Leger and Mike McLeod. Please rise and enjoy the warm hospitality of the Assembly.

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to this House two firefighters from Cochrane who are here today attending the IAFF conference. Both are tremendous advocates for their fellow firefighters, and I'd like to thank them for their dedication and service to the province. Would Chris Chyka and Russ Innes please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

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

Mr. Wright: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my guests Josh and Dylan, located in the Speaker's lounge. They are some of Medicine Hat's best and brightest and amazing first responders. Thank you to both of you for your service, and thank you for all the dedication to our community. I would encourage them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

I have one more group to introduce.

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

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly representatives from the Health Sciences Association in the Speaker's gallery. The Health Sciences Association was founded in 1971 by 11 health professionals. It has now grown to be the largest health care union in the province, representing more than 30,000 . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Mr. Speaker, I have never felt more safe in this Assembly than I do right now. I'd like to acknowledge the firefighters from Strathcona county that are here. Eric Lowe, Matt Larsen, and Alex Tetoff, please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce you to Kelly Carter, the CEO of Alberta Wildlife Federation; Paul Short, the president and also a constituent of mine; and also the St. Albert Firefighters Union, that does fabulous work in St. Albert.

If I can ask you all to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation.

Mrs. Sawyer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you the team from Alberta Pulse Growers, who represent over 5,400 of Alberta's farmers growing peas, lentils, chickpeas, and other nutritious crops. Our province exports over $792 million of pulses every year, making us one of the largest exporters in the world. I ask them to please rise and accept . . .

The Speaker: The Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you two guests in the gallery today, Brad Martin, president of the Lloydminster Fire Fighter's Association, and Donald Schille, vice-president of the Lloydminster Fire Fighter's Association. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you two guests of mine from Surerus Pipeline Incorporated, Les Brownlie and operations manager Jaret Surerus. They're a proud Canadian company with a long history of building critical energy infrastructure across western Canada. I'd like them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Children and Family Services.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly some incredible members from the Spruce Grove Fire Fighters Association: Justin Jaeger, Jordan Hanratty, Lucas Whittall, and Jamie Doucette. Please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Edmonton-South.

Member Hoyle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce 12 members of the University of Alberta's Law and Policy Student Society. I know their future is bright. Could you please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Introductions are done. My apologies to anybody that didn't get introduced. We just had way more today than we could do.

Mr. Williams: I ask unanimous consent of the House to continue introductions.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: We're going to go back to the hon. minister of hospitals to finish your introduction since we're now using more time.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Health Sciences Association represents 30,000 front-line members, over 240 professions, 226 local units. President Leane Alfaro, VP Omer Hussein, and executive director Christine deMontigny and all others, please stand up and receive our warm welcome.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you the International Association of Firefighters leadership that has joined us: president Elliott Davis; Cole Chapelsky, the secretary-treasurer; Heather Merlo from the executive director; and Gage Wood from Manitoba, the secretary-treasurer. Please rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Multiculturalism.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Rob Rohatyn and Daniel Hernandez, executive members of the Edmonton Heritage Festival Association. The Edmonton Heritage Festival Association welcomes ethnocultural communities, neighbours, and friends to Alberta's largest multicultural celebration. May I ask Rob and Daniel to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

1:40

The Speaker: Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you Brad Lancop and Mel Van Adrichem from the Canmore Fire Fighters Association local 4705. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and the Assembly the president and vice-presidents of the Calgary Firefighters Association: Jamie Blayney, Matt Endsin, and Cory McKeen. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Livingstone-Macleod.

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you four high school trustees from Livingstone Range school division. I ask them to please rise – Brad Toone, Kathy Charchun, Carla Gimber, and Lori Hodges – and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you three amazing people with Central Alberta Paramedics Association. Erin Houghton, Keegan Thompson, and Robyn Bishop provide emergency medical care, compassion, and support to people in Wetaskiwin and across Alberta. Their commitment and service play a vital role in providing critical emergency services when we need them. Please rise to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Wright: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Chamber my guests from Diabetes Canada who are working diligently to educate Albertans on the impact of diabetes. I would please ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Chamber.

The Speaker: Lethbridge-West.

Member Miyashiro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you a member of the Lethbridge school division board of trustees, Mr. Brooke Culley. A warm welcome from the Assembly, from all.

Members' Statements

World Diabetes Day

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, on November 14 Albertans mark World Diabetes Day, a day that shines a light on one of the fastest growing

health challenges facing our province. Nearly 1 in 3 Albertans live with diabetes or prediabetes, and hundreds of thousands more are at risk. Alberta has one of the highest rates of new diabetes diagnoses in Canada. Behind these numbers are families managing lifelong conditions, seniors facing serious complications, and children who are dependent on constant monitoring to stay healthy in schools.

Diabetes can shorten life expectancy up to 15 years. It can significantly increase the risk of heart disease, stroke, kidney failure, blindness, and amputations. It also places a massive burden on our health care system, costing close to a billion dollars every year. Yet diabetes does not impact all Albertans equally. Indigenous communities experience disproportionately higher rates of the disease. Albertans facing barriers related to income, education, food insecurity, housing, social support, and access to health care are also more likely to develop diabetes and experience its complications.

Mr. Speaker, this does not have to be the reality. Diabetes prevention and early detection are effective, and management saves lives and reduces the long-term cost. That's why I call on this government to release the 2024 Alberta diabetes working group report that was submitted to the government. I call on this government to improve access to medication and technologies and establish a province-wide standard of care support for students living with diabetes in our schools. Every day that this government delays action means more preventable complications and greater pressure on our health care system. I call on the government to commit to meaningful action that improves prevention, expands access to care, and helps every Albertan live a healthier and quality life.

Thank you.

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

Federal Policies and Energy Development

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's never been any question about where the loyalties of the UCP government stand: with Albertans, first and always. We can't say the same about the NDP. They've been the hand puppets of their bosses in Ottawa, first and always. This was never more apparent than when we took the federal government to court not once, not twice but three times to fight them over C-69, more commonly referred to as the no-new-pipelines law.

The reality was that it would never have killed more than just jobs for our local economy but for all Albertans. Mr. Speaker, that's right up the alley for the no development party. Instead of fighting Justin Trudeau and Stephen Guilbeault's best efforts to kill our economy, they fought against Alberta and urged us to give up. Thank goodness the NDP are no longer in charge. Investment fled Alberta during their four disastrous years in power. It was so bad that they were telling Albertans who lived here for generations to leave because there was no work.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's safe to say that Alberta has recovered. We are on the cusp of becoming a world energy superpower because we fought the overreach and socialist virtue signalling from Justin Trudeau and his orange friends. The courts have spoken, and Ottawa can no longer ignore the damage caused by previous federal government policies. What Albertans are expecting from our government is real leadership, and saying that all along, this is being recognized by Alberta for the good work that we have done. A strong energy sector benefits not just Albertans but all Canadians. Federal policy must reflect that reality and support the tremendous economic opportunities Alberta's energy industry creates for our entire country, all because this government puts Albertans first and foremost always.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

High School Graduation Requirements

Member Batten: This government has made a habit of making massive decisions first and then asking questions never. Albertans have seen it time and time again. Whether it's curriculum changes, attacks on workers' rights, or now weakening high school graduation requirements, the pattern is always the same: no evidence, no consultation, no respect for the people who will live with the consequences. Honestly, that's what so many parents, teachers, and students are finding so insulting, not just the decision itself but the arrogance behind it.

The UCP has admitted that they did not consult teachers, parents, students, school boards, or educational experts before announcing changes that fundamentally altered what an Alberta diploma means. Our once world-class education system stripped by this UCP government. The lesson this government teaches: consultation is optional, evidence is inconvenient, and people don't matter. The UCP government creates problems and leaves everyone else to clean up the mess without any support.

The Premier says that she didn't know class sizes had become unmanageable. She didn't know the complexity that was being faced in classrooms. How is that possible? Teachers, parents, trustees, students have been sounding the alarm for years. The problem isn't that no one told the government. The problem is that the government didn't listen to teachers, parents, and trustees.

Now, in a world that demands critical thinking, communication skills, and informed citizenship, this government is moving to reduce the importance of subjects like math, science, and social studies. Students would have more opportunities, more flexibility, more freedom to pursue their futures if they had access to a strong, properly funded public education system with clear and consistent standards. Our schools should be opening doors for students' futures. Instead, the UCP is lowering the bar because they failed to do the hard work of investing in our public system.

Students deserve better than that. Students deserve a government that puts them ahead of politics and power, and that government, Mr. Speaker, is the Alberta NDP.

Flag Displays

Mrs. Petrovic: Mr. Speaker, I was recently in the United States, and one thing stood out to me more than anything else. The American flag was everywhere; on homes, farms, businesses, and storefronts. People displayed it openly, unapologetically, and without feeling compelled to explain themselves. It made me reflect on where we are today. In Alberta we've reached a point where even a flag can become a test of political loyalty.

Mr. Speaker, I've always wanted to be a flag person. I wanted to fly the Alberta flag because I'm proud of this province, proud of our people, our work ethics, our communities, and our resilience. Yet today too often we use symbols to divide instead of unite. If I fly an Alberta flag, someone assumes they know my politics. If I fly a Canadian flag, others assume I've forgotten how Alberta has been treated by Ottawa. Neither assumption is true. Loving Alberta and demanding better for Alberta should never be mistaken for lack of loyalty.

For years federal policies have undermined our industries, dismissed our concerns, and treated Alberta as something to manage rather than a partner to respect. Albertans have every right to be frustrated, and this government will never apologize for standing up for Alberta. We will continue to fight for fair treatment for our energy sector, for our farmers, ranchers, workers, families, and communities. But standing up for Alberta should never mean

turning Albertans against one another. The objective is not division; the objective is unity.

A stronger Alberta is built when we focus on what we have in common, not on the labels we place on one another. The greatest threat to Alberta is not the flag on someone's lawn. It's the growing belief that anyone who sees things differently must somehow be the enemy. That's not who we are. Alberta was built by people who worked hard, helped their neighbours, and came together to solve problems. The measure of the person is not the flag they fly; it's their character. So fly your Alberta flag. Fly your Canada flag. Fly both, but let's stop treating symbols as weapons and start treating each other like fellow Albertans.

Alberta's future will not be built through anger or division. It will be built through unity. It will be built through opportunity. It will be built through strong families and strong communities, and this United Conservative government will continue to stand up for Alberta's future.

1:50 Oral Question Period

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

Flag Displays at Schools

Mr. Nenshi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I had the opportunity to hear the Premier speak to the Alberta School Boards Association. It was eye-opening to see the extent to which this Premier either doesn't know or doesn't care about the implications of her decisions on real people. Let's start with flagpoles. This endless virtue signalling has real repercussions. Does the Premier now understand that this ridiculous culture war policy will take millions and millions of dollars from Alberta's schools and students?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier of Alberta.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, the member opposite didn't just hear the excellent member's statement from the Member for Livingstone-Macleod or hasn't looked at you in a little while, Mr. Speaker, and saw that, look, lo and behold . . .

The Speaker: Premier, no one gets to bring the Speaker into debate even if it's friendly.

Ms Smith: Looked at the front of the room, Mr. Speaker, and, lo and behold, we have a Canadian flag on one side of the dais and an Alberta flag on the other side of the dais. As a result, this is what we want to do. We want to make sure that everyone walking into the school will proudly be able to identify with their Alberta heritage and their Canadian heritage. That's the intention of the flag policy.

Mr. Nenshi: Ah, the road to hell, Mr. Speaker, and intentions. This government is full of intentions and full of bad implementation. When the ASBA told her yesterday that it would cost millions of dollars to put up new flagpoles, she argued with them. She said: you're padding your numbers. And then a few minutes later she said: oh, it's starting to look pretty impractical, quote, unquote. Well, yeah. It's pretty impractical. People have been telling this government about this for a year, and she wouldn't listen. Why is the Premier so enamoured with this culture war stuff that she never stops to ask why it impacts real people?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, admittedly, we didn't know that it is common to only have one flagpole at a school, and in fact in Canada it is against protocol to have two flags on a single pole. As a result, we got great feedback from the Alberta School Boards Association. I've raised it with my education minister, and it seems more practical to do exactly like what we do in this Chamber, to have on flagpoles in a stand in the foyer the Canadian flag and the Alberta flag. There are lots of ways to be able to achieve the same target. [interjections]

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

Mr. Nenshi: Her answer when she's not blaming people is always: I didn't know. Well, she should have known. Good leaders know because they ask questions, because they listen to people. Why are we even here? Schools are in crisis. We're sitting here arguing about flags. We're sitting here . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. I just said: let's hear the question and the answer.

Add five seconds on.

Mr. Nenshi: We're sitting here arguing about flags. We're sitting here arguing about virtue signalling. It was obvious the government . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Now we're going to add 10 seconds more on. We can do this all day unless we hear the question.

Mr. Nenshi: Look, it's obvious the government just wanted to ban the pride flag, but they didn't have the guts to say it. They thought the dog whistle would be loud enough for others to hear. Why can't they just be honest with Albertans, show us who they really are, and just ban the pride flag?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, yes, good leaders do ask questions. They ask questions when they're presented with a report in 2015 wondering why all the recommendations didn't get put to council. They ask questions when they're told in 2017 and 2020: boy, you better look at the water main going to Bearspaw because there might be problems. They ask questions when they lose one of their department heads because they don't put this information to council. That's what good leaders do. That is not what he did. What I did yesterday was listen to what ASBA said, and we're going to change it.

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

School Class Size and Complexity

Mr. Nenshi: The Premier is telling on herself yet again. Because she's the kind of leader who doesn't follow files, who doesn't know what's going on, and doesn't take action, she assumes everybody's like that. But that's not how government is. Another shocking thing the Premier said yesterday is that she, quote, left schools alone, unquote, in the first year of her mandate. Leaving them alone, of course, means telling teachers what they can say in the classroom, punching down on vulnerable kids, and banning books.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Mr. Nenshi: But issues of class size and complexity, quote, never made it to the minister's desk. Unquote. Sorry; what? How could they possible not have known about the state of public education?

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:55.

While we didn't note anybody's phone going off, thank you for that.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, Calgarians are taking three-minute showers because that member opposite, as mayor for 10 years, knew that there were problems, didn't ask more questions, didn't make decisions, didn't ensure that water pipes were being repaired, and watched after he left as they exploded time and time again. That's on him.

We heard from teachers that they had a classroom complexity issue. We established a complexity task force. Every single month we meet. We get feedback from our superintendents, our trustees, and teachers, and we act on them, Mr. Speaker. That's what leadership looks like. He doesn't have it. [interjections]

The Speaker: Are we done? It's time to listen to the person recognized.

Mr. Nenshi: The Premier will continue to grasp at straws because she can't defend her own record here. This government doesn't act on things. The Premier has often admitted that she gets all her information from Twitter and right-wing podcasts. It took a teachers' strike, as she just admitted, for her to realize there was a problem in public education. She accused boards of not doing anything about these issues, assuming they also didn't know. We've got a government that's not paying attention, not funding boards. What money are they supposed to use to solve the problem on their own when the government doesn't know and doesn't care?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, when he was mayor, $1.2 billion was diverted away from water pipeline repair for his pet projects, like building rings and building towers at the side of the road. What we did is – we heard there were problems. We've established an $8.6 billion school construction program. We've established complexity teams, 699 of them. We've hired 2,000 teachers, 1,000 educational assistants. And every single month we are troubleshooting with the superintendents of the biggest boards to make sure that they're identifying issues, and we're solving them.

Mr. Nenshi: And with that answer the Premier proves once again she has no idea how government works, and she doesn't understand big numbers.

She's telling on herself yet again. The boards were working on these problems. They were desperately working on these problems, with no support from this government. Now these government complexity teams that she's so proud of are taking away subs, and they're taking away full-time teachers. People aren't coming into the profession. Schools are still short-staffed. It hurts children. It hurts parents. [interjections] No amount of yapping from them is going to make public education better. When will the government stop fighting and start acting?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite got briefed in a report and withheld information from his council so that they could not act on it, and 10 years later Calgarians are having three-minute showers because of his negligence. What we did on this side is that we've talked to teachers. We've talked to trustees. We have talked to superintendents. We identified issues, and we're resolving them. If you talk to teachers who have a complexity team in their school as we have, they have said that it has been transformational, and we're going to continue doing this because we solve problems. They just create them.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:59.

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

High School Graduation Requirements

Mr. Nenshi: The problem here, of course, is that the Premier either doesn't get briefed, doesn't care about what she's briefed on, or doesn't pay any attention to it unless she reads about it on Twitter or hears about it from Joe Rogan. Now for three days the Premier has refused to answer a question on who asked her for those Friday the 13th curriculum changes. Yesterday in a room of several hundred school board trustees I asked how many of them had been consulted. Not a single hand went up. Again, who asked for this, and why does this government, that doesn't act on anything, act on this so quickly?

2:00

Ms Smith: The member opposite has a tell. He accuses me of things he does himself. He doesn't get briefed. He doesn't pay attention when he does get briefed, and then he doesn't act on it when he does get briefed, and that's why Calgarians have three-minute showers, Mr. Speaker. I'll tell you who gave us feedback. It was the students' committee that the minister of education regularly meets with, and guess what they told us they wanted? They told us that it would be really helpful to have financial literacy training so that when they graduated from school they were prepared for the jobs of the future as well as for the economy.

Mr. Nenshi: No student asked for this. The student said: fix CALM 20. And the minister, clearly, like the Premier, heard what he wanted to hear because there's not one person in that room who supported these changes. These are the people who are closest to schools and closest to students. They think this is going to hurt students. I've already asked and received no answer. How are we planning on tripling the number of gyms in every high school in Alberta? Yesterday I heard from the trustees that their analysis shows far more students will take a fourth and a fifth year. How will the government fund these students?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I was just handed a page of William Aberhart high school student responses on the curriculum consultation that the minister did, and they've given exactly what we've been saying here. They want more focus on careers. They want to make sure that they're taught things that are practical. They want to ensure that there's financial literacy. They actually do want to have more education on wellness. Mental health is a very serious issue. Anxiety and social anxiety are serious issues. Being able to have physical health and physical education is important. We are listening to students, and we're going to act on this.

The Speaker: I know that document will get tabled today or tomorrow.

Mr. Nenshi: I actually heard that radio interview, which is a radio interview, not a consultation. I'm sorry that the Premier was misled by that.

Here the flagpoles cost schools a fortune. Banning books costs schools a fortune. The new curriculum is going to cost schools a fortune. Yet under this Premier we have one of the least funded public education systems in the entire country. Class sizes have never been larger, they've never been more complex even though the Premier didn't know, and we're drifting further and further away from Peter Lougheed's dream of the best public education system in the world. Will the Premier admit today that focusing on culture wars has hurt students?

Ms Smith: Will the member opposite admit today that we have to have more control over the number of people coming into our province so that we do not have our schools getting overwhelmed? In 2022 the

Calgary board of education was talking about closing 14,000 student spaces. In the space of five years we added net new 90,000 students. It is not possible to build schools fast enough. It is difficult and puts pressure on schools. This is the reason why we got a mandate from Albertans that we want to be able to pace the number of people coming into our province, and we'd welcome some support from the NDP on that.

Presumptive WCB Coverage for Wildland Firefighters

Ms Ganley: This morning I had the absolute privilege to meet with some of the people who put their lives on the line every day to protect the people of this province: firefighters. They protect us all, and when they get sick because of the critical work they do, they would like us to do the same for them and the families they leave behind. It seems pretty reasonable. I was shocked to discover that this Premier has never met with them, not ever. The last Premier to meet with these firefighters was Rachel Notley. Will the Premier agree to meet with them today?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, you cannot come into this Chamber and spew complete falsehoods. What the member just said was entirely inaccurate, and I can tell you that we have met with the firefighters union, myself particularly, and I can tell you that this government takes it very seriously. I can tell the members opposite are angry with the fact that we continue to meet with members from the public because we need to better understand what it is they need from their government. That's what leadership is. On the opposition side they call public consultation a sham. That's not leadership. That's just failure.

Ms Ganley: The Premier has not met with them. One minister has been willing to meet with them. The minister of public safety hasn't done it, and the minister in charge of WCB, the rules they are trying to change, gave them 17 minutes. They have gotten no progress on the issue. The science has evolved and proved that many types of cancer are caused by being a firefighter, but this government won't extend presumptive coverage. It makes firefighters fighting to survive cancer also fight to prove their individual cancer was caused by work. It's inhumane. Will the Premier meet with them today?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, the issue of presumptive coverage is a very important one, and it's one that we look at very seriously, particularly taking into consideration the data showing that some types of cancers are directly related to work exposure. That is why we continue to consult with stakeholders, making sure we understand what it is that we need to know so we can better respond. To say that we have not met with firefighters is patently false, and it is unfair for the member opposite to stand in this Chamber and say things that are completely inaccurate and to mislead the Chamber. [interjections]

The Speaker: I hear from people that haven't been recognized.

Now let's hear from Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, the evidence is already there on these cancers, but this government won't hear it. These firefighters are fighting to protect Albertans, to protect their colleagues, and to protect the families of the colleagues that they have lost. Every time one of us calls them, they answer the call, no matter who and no matter when. But this government, this Premier, has refused to answer that call. Shame. She can meet with separatists, with Trump officials, with online trolls and hate groups of any number of varieties but not with firefighters.

The Speaker: If that was a question, I'm not sure if it was government policy.

Go ahead, hon. House leader.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to stand and answer. The fact is that on this side of the House the Premier and members of the government caucus meet with people whether we agree with them or not, unlike the members opposite, which is why we have met with firefighters to talk about things like presumptive coverage. I can tell you that Alberta's government will continue to look at the research regarding the links between occupational psychological injuries and other injuries and the compensation system. Also, workers are covered by WCB, and they can still file a claim for injuries even without presumptive coverage. We will continue to consult, but the members opposite need to stop lying about this.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:07.

The next set of questions . . . [interjections] Order. The next set of questions belongs to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

High School Graduation Requirements
(continued)

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: The UCP's shortsighted changes to graduation requirements are getting a big fat F from teachers, parents, and students. The Alberta School Councils' Association president, Meagan Parisian, told the *Medicine Hat News* that eliminating requirements for math 30, English 30, science 30 will make it much more difficult for students to get the degree, the diploma, or into a trades program. Why is this minister making it harder for students to get the basic qualifications they need to get in trades programs?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, the CBC interviewed some students at William Aberhart school recently. Here's what they had to say: I think it's great. Student number 2: I think it's amazing. Student number 4: well, I feel betrayed that they didn't do this earlier. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Sorry. Just stop the clock here. I can almost touch the minister from here. I won't do that, but the fact that he's that close and that I can't hear him is a problem.

Please continue.

Mr. Nicolaides: The first student commented to CBC saying: I think it's great. The second student commented to CBC saying: I think it's amazing; it's amazing work, and they should keep it up. A third student said: I feel betrayed that they didn't do this earlier. Another student said: well, I just feel like I'm never going to use something like social 30, and instead I could be more focused on robotics, science, and math instead.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that there are more than three students in Alberta's schools, why are they making it harder for these students to get into the trades programs that they need? And given that Kevin Van Lagen, a UCP candidate aiming to run in Drumheller-Stettler, said, and I quote, that he is particularly concerned about the changes that reduce student exposure to history, to government, to literature, and to the world around them, end quote, why is this government ignoring parents and students beyond the two you talked to, teachers, and their own prospective candidates and failing our students?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister . . . [interjections] Order. We're going to hear from the minister.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Apart from the several students that I had the opportunity to quote from, a lot of research also supports the changes that we're making. In particular a recent study in the *Alberta Journal of Educational Research* found that there are significant problems with the CALM curriculum. They noted that it is frequently viewed by students as disconnected from the real world, leading to a sharp rise in students feeling detached from their postgraduation choices. That's precisely why we've made changes to physical education, wellness, and financial literacy in direct alignment with research findings right here in Alberta.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Rutherford.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that all students in Alberta deserve the right to learn about all parts of our history, including the beauty of our treaties and the horror of the legacy of the Indian residential schools, but given that this UCP government is attacking literacy, numeracy, the basic requirements for postsecondary, and given that they are removing Métis and treaty flags from schools, violating the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action and the United Nations declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples, when will this government listen to citizens?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, how rich to suggest that we're attacking literacy and numeracy. When I brought forward a bill to strengthen literacy and numeracy in Alberta, to require literacy and numeracy screening for every student in kindergarten to grade 3, the NDP voted against it. They objected to it. They don't want to strengthen literacy and numeracy. We do. That's where our priority is, and that's where it will remain: making sure that students have choices, that students can choose their future, and that they have the strongest possible foundation to succeed.

The Speaker: The next question belongs to the hon. Member for Camrose.

Career and Employment Services

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every Albertan deserves the opportunity to find meaningful work, earn a paycheque, and build a better future for themselves and their families. Today our government celebrated the grand opening of Prospect Art Collective in Edmonton, an innovative simulated work site giving Albertans hands-on retail experience, building skills and confidence that they need to succeed. Can the Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services tell this House about today's announcement and the nearly quarter billion dollar investment our government is making to help Albertans find and keep meaningful employment?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I join Prospect Human Services in Edmonton to celebrate the grand opening of the Prospect Art Collective. Through Budget 2026 our government is investing $247 million in career and employment services to help Albertans find and keep meaningful work. That includes nearly $35 million for 35 simulated work sites in 13 communities. Of those sites 27 opened their doors this year, more than quadrupling the number of simulated work sites across the province. We're giving more Albertans the chance to learn on the job, build confidence, and take that experience to their next employer.

The Speaker: Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for his efforts to help all Albertans find meaningful work. Given that for many Albertans the biggest obstacle to finding a job is getting the experience needed to land one in the first place, given that Albertans can face different barriers when entering or returning to the workforce and that gaining the experience employers ask for can itself be a challenge, can the same minister explain the types of employment supports available and how simulated work sites help Albertans prepare for a job?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is investing nearly a quarter billion dollars in employment services, including career planning, assistive technology, and supported job placements. Albertans can also get help accessing child care and transportation. Simulated work sites give people the experience employers are asking for. At Prospect Art Collective participants serve customers, organize merchandise, and help run the store. At their next interview they can tell the employer what they've done, what they've learned, and how they can contribute to their next job.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Albertans with disabilities have tremendous skills, talents, and abilities to contribute to our economy and deserve every opportunity to put those talents to work and given that our government believes that a disability should never mean someone is overlooked or denied the opportunity to build a rewarding career but some may need additional support to find and maintain employment, can the same minister explain how our government is helping them access opportunities to work and build greater independence?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When an Albertan with a disability tells us they want to work, the compassionate response is to take that goal seriously. Through ADAP Albertans get customized one-on-one support. We also help employers hire and accommodate Albertans with disabilities. ADAP clients can earn up to $45,000 a year and still receive financial assistance. Their health benefits continue regardless of those earnings. That gives more Albertans the opportunity to put their talents to work, earn a paycheque, and build a more independent future.

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

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of respect for taxi drivers. I used to be one, but I never let anybody drink in my cab. Taxi drivers put up with plenty from passengers who've had one bourbon too many, so my constituents are frustrated to see the minister's $5,400 You Sip, We Drive distillery tour described as a taxi expense. Service Alberta's schedule priced rental cars is at about $2,300. Even his own senior financial officer said it seems like more than a taxi. Why won't the minister admit that the Kentucky booze cruise was not a taxi?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, the members of the opposition continue to harp on the trade missions, and they don't understand the value

that they have. When someone tells you who they are, you should believe them. Members of the opposition are a perfect example. If they were ever, ever, heaven forbid, to become government, they would not go into foreign markets to promote Alberta. They have insulted CEOs. They have insulted foreign dignitaries. They have insulted tradespeople and students. That is what the members opposite do. They want to insult instead of get to work. It's totally ridiculous. On this side of the House we'll . . .

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

Mr. Dach: Given that grocery prices still remain sky high and given that everyday Albertans are still struggling to afford a vacation in the Rockies, much less an 11-distillery tour of the Kentucky bourbon distilleries, and given that the minister brought his chief of staff's husband, failed UCP candidate and COVID denialist Gary Davidson, along for the ride but his expenses were hidden from Albertans, will the minister apologize and pay back every tax dollar to struggling Albertans for this waste of their money?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, the members opposite continue to come into this Chamber and mislead with false information. I can tell you that no money was spent on alcohol on any of the trade missions any ministers have gone on, and I can tell you that we will continue to promote Alberta in foreign markets because what it does is create employment opportunities right here in the province. That is one of the best ways, one of many, to help people deal with an affordability crisis, to make sure they have meaningful employment and employment that provides dignity. Members opposite drove companies out of this province. On this side we're going to attract them.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

The Speaker: At 2:18 p.m. a point of order is noted.

Mr. Dach: Given that a luxury You Sip, We Drive booze cruise is not a taxi and given the Appalachian Mountain booze cruise cost Albertans $5,400, whereas a rental car would have been $2,300, and one could have actually bought a good, used, big yellow taxi for that much money, and given that this week the UCP government seems to think Albertan students don't even need math 30 to graduate, a very simple question to the minister: is 5,400 a bigger number than 2,300?

The Speaker: I'm sure the question was fun to ask but it was definitely not on government policy, which is what's required here. The government can answer should they choose to do so.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, I've become accustomed to the members opposite not being on topic and not even having anything remotely related to government policy.

What I can say on this side of the House is that we will continue to promote Alberta both in the United States and around the world. The rest of the world knows where our province is because of the diligent work of members of the front bench, government caucus, and our Premier, who promotes us as the best place to work and to raise a family and to invest. That is why we've seen record investment in job creation, something the members opposite couldn't dream of in 100 years.

2:20

Member Campbell: The Premier claimed yesterday that the minister for service Alberta took lots of meetings on his distillery tour, but here's the minister's itinerary: one hour and 45 minutes of meetings with elected officials, 17 and a half hours of distillery tours. The minister spent 10 times longer seeing how mash turns to bourbon than any actual meetings and stuck Albertans with a $5,400 booze cruise bill in the middle of a trade war. Will the minister apologize for this misuse of taxpayers' dollars and pay the money back?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the Member for Calgary-Shaw pointing out that the hon. minister of service Alberta met with delegations in the United States and elected officials. That is our job. We go and we promote Alberta, particularly in the United States as we are facing strained trade relationships with the current presidential administration. We will not stop. Members of the government caucus and ministers continue to engage with foreign dignitaries, including most recently Adam Schiff, a Democrat from California, to remind our neighbours to the south that we're friends and we need to keep working together. [interjections]

The Speaker: Everybody talking should probably consult their House leader to see if they can get on the schedule to speak and be recognized, but until then we've got Calgary-Shaw.

Member Campbell: Given that this government's travel, meal, and hospitality expenses policy requires any person who files an expense to file it under their own name and given that when the minister went on the Kentucky booze cruise, his chief of staff's husband and rejected UCP candidate Gary Davidson tagged along at the expense of taxpayers, and given that I've been an MLA for two months and four days and even I know that that is an inappropriate expense, why did the minister break his own government's policies, and when will the taxpayers get this repayment cheque for the whole thing?

The Speaker: Again, interesting question, not necessarily government policy.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to report that actually the speaker lineup is a whip problem, but I digress.

When it comes to meeting with elected officials down south and in particular the chief of staff's husband attending, nothing was paid for out of government coffers for that trip, Mr. Speaker. That person paid their own way. In addition, the trip was meant to promote Alberta as we now are trying to promote tourism in the province. Now, if you look at the members opposite's campaign platform, not a single word about tourism. They clearly just don't care.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary . . . [interjections] I thought it was all your turn. Turns out to be mine.

Calgary-Shaw.

Member Campbell: Given that the very same policy requires all international travel to be economical and given that service Alberta officials price out rental cars for just under $2,300 and given that the minister's job should be reducing red tape and not rolling out red carpets, voters would expect them to use the economical option, not the boozy service that more than doubled the cost of personally cruising around 11 distilleries, why hasn't the Premier demanded the money back for her minister's overly inflated, taxpayer-funded, bourbon tasting tour?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, again, it sounds more than appropriate for the member to go down to the United States as we recently passed the Whisky Act and we're promoting the whisky trail here in Alberta. It's obviously something I would have no interest in, but I can tell you many Albertans do. I'll tell you that we're driving tourism to new heights in this province with $25 billion as the goal. Now, what will hurt tourism is not having reliable, sustainable

running water. I'm sure the Member for Calgary-Shaw is grateful he's in Edmonton today and he can take a shower that's longer than three minutes. Thank his leader for that.

The Speaker: The next question belongs . . . [interjections] Well, we only get 50 minutes. How you spend it, I guess, is somewhat up to you.

The next question belongs to the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Gull Lake Water Level Stabilization Project

Mrs. Johnson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Alberta's first provincial park, Gull Lake is an important part of this province border to border. Over the past five years its water level has reached record lows, dropping 20 centimetres annually, impacting wildlife, recreation, tourism, and investment. While bringing back pumping from nearby Blindman River can help restore water to healthier levels, it's not the only solution. To the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation: when can we expect the new pressurized filtration system to be installed and for pumping to begin again?

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation.

Mrs. Sawyer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question and for advocating for her constituents. We do understand the urgency residents feel about restoring Gull Lake's water level. That's why we're installing a new filtration system with plans to test it and have it ready by next spring. The Blindman River is high enough; that's where we'll be pumping this system. It'll give us another way to restore the water levels in Gull Lake. Residents want to see progress, and we're doing the work to deliver it responsibly and protect Gull Lake for years to come.

The Speaker: Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mrs. Johnson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that exciting answer. Given the importance of ensuring that this new filtration system effectively protects Gull Lake from invasive Prussian carp and their eggs and further given that restoring the lake's water levels is important to rebuild confidence and investment in and around the Gull Lake community, could the same minister please explain what performance measures and ongoing monitoring will be used to evaluate the system's effectiveness?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Sawyer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the member. Protecting Gull Lake from invasive Prussian carp is a priority for us in this project. In fact, the filtration system we're installing has already been successfully tested using Prussian carp eggs. The system will include sensors, remote monitoring, alarms, automatic shutdown procedures. We're going to go with annual testing before the water ever reaches the lake. These safeguards will help ensure that the system operates as it is intended and will keep Prussian carp out of Gull Lake.

The Speaker: Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mrs. Johnson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister again for that wonderful answer. Given that pumping into Gull Lake ceased in 2011 and that the government suspended the water licence in 2018 after Prussian carp were discovered in nearby Blindman River and further given the government has since partnered with the Gull Lake Watershed Society, which recently won an Alberta summer villages award for this new filtration system, can the same minister please explain how this new pressurized filtration system will prevent invasive Prussian carp from entering Gull Lake?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mrs. Sawyer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you again to the member. The new filtration system which is being installed will create a physical barrier between the Blindman River and Gull Lake. The new filtration system has screens that will stop material larger than 200 microns. For context, Prussian carp eggs average about 1,000 microns. There will be monitoring. There will be alarms, annual testing, automatic shutdown procedures. That will provide further protection once the pumping actually begins. The new system will give us a responsible plan to resume pumping without reopening the door to the stress that stopped it in the first place.

Investigation of Health Services Procurement

Member Eremenko: Mr. Speaker, the Premier promised that she'd fix the failing health care system in 90 days. It's been 1,472, and we are not better off. It's promises made, promises broken with this Premier. The Minister of Justice has been promising the Auditor General's report into corrupt care for months, but this government has done nothing but block the investigation at every turn, just like they did for DynaLife. When can Albertans expect this government to get out of the way and let the Auditor General deliver their report?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The irony from the NDP continues to amaze me. The office of the Auditor General operates independently from government, and we're going to keep it that way. We're not going to interfere with the Auditor General's ability to do the work that it needs to do. We're not going to interfere with the Auditor General's ability to publish that report when he is ready to do so. We've demonstrated time and again that we will co-operate with all of the inquiries involved. We supplied all of the material we can to Justice Wyant. We'll do that for the Auditor General as well.

Member Eremenko: Given that the government continues to hide behind arguments of process to delay the Auditor General from delivering the report, just like they did with the DynaLife procurement investigation, and given that the RCMP has been engaged in a criminal investigation into this government's corrupt procurement practices, including money laundering, and given when they had the chance, not a single UCP member at committee this week sought real accountability from the department, when will we get an honest answer from this government about the corrupt care scandal?

The Speaker: The minister.

2:30

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker. I don't quite understand what the member is asking. Does she want us to interfere with the work of the Auditor General? We will absolutely not do that. The Auditor General is working on a report. The Auditor General operates independently of government. We do not direct that office on what to do. That member needs to communicate openly and transparently to the public. The Auditor General's office is independent, and it's going to stay that way.

Member Eremenko: Given that Albertans struggle accessing even the most basic primary care and given that the average hours spent in the emergency department are still in the double digits and surgical wait

times are many, many months long and given that this government has failed to tackle the health care crisis as promised and instead they've dismantled the system piece by piece so they can sell those pieces off at sweetheart rates to their friends and family, can any of the health ministers, any one of the four, come clean and confess that this government has no intention of protecting public health care?

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

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to report that since we have been in office, we are now at 14,661 physicians, a 23 per cent increase since 2019; 53,000 registered nurses, a 38 per cent increase since 2019; 22,000 licensed practical nurses, a 28 per cent increase since 2019; 37,000 health care aides working across this province, another increase. We're making a difference.

Provincial Fiscal Position

Mr. Rowswell: Mr. Speaker, Albertans have watched global energy markets shift significantly this year, with the Iran conflict driving oil prices well above what was anticipated when Budget 2026 was tabled. Many constituents have heard that the province's fiscal outlook has improved in recent months and are eager to understand what this means for Alberta's finances. Could the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance please provide an update on the province's fiscal position?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, in Q1 we were happy to report an $11.4 billion turnaround in the province's books, presenting what would become the sixth consecutive balanced budget. I will have more to say on Q2 next week. Now, I want to compare that to our friends across the aisle, who, when they were in government, had four consecutive unbalanced budgets and continued to bet against the industries that are driving revenue into this province. We're very excited about what's taking place in Alberta. We are the envy of the country, and we are the envy of the world because of the hard work that's happening here.

The Speaker: Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. Given that the first-quarter update forecasts a surplus for '26-27 and some Albertans may assume this means that the province has extra money to spend today and further given that the forecast is an accounting surplus, including retained revenues in the heritage fund and government business enterprises, and differs from cash on hand, can the minister explain the difference between projected surplus and a cash operating surplus and why the distinction matters?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, in Q1 we did announce a $2 billion accounting surplus, meaning that there was no cash surplus yet because that's coming from primarily the heritage savings trust fund and other investments of the government. I anticipate that I will announce a much larger surplus next week, but we'll have to wait for that announcement. Why, though, we see this taking place in our province is because Alberta's government, the Conservative government, went and fixed the heritage savings trust fund. The NDP pillaged it when they came in, emptied out the legacy of our province and the birthright of Alberta children. We fixed that. We're going to be $50 billion soon.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and the minister for that answer. [interjections]

The Speaker: This isn't hard. We recognize somebody; we listen to the person recognized. Let's try that.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and the minister for that answer. Given that the higher oil prices have boosted provincial revenues yet energy prices can change quickly and Albertans remember the challenges associated with past downturns and further given that Albertans want a stronger, more stable revenue base, less exposed to global oil market swings, can the minister speak to how this government is diversifying Alberta's economy to strengthen the province's long-term fiscal position?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, this government has invested $19 billion in 2026 in other industries besides oil and gas. We're proud of our oil and gas industry. We want to make sure we can continue to diversify our economy. That's resulted in over 45,000 high-paying jobs here inside this province. Trade jobs: I know the NDP and their leader don't like tradespeople, but we're proud of those jobs. We're proud of those people. Those are the people that are building this province, and they're going to be the people who fix the pipe that the former mayor of Calgary never bothered to fix and to be able to make sure the citizens of Calgary can finally have showers.

Natural Gas Pipeline Development

Ms Al-Guneid: Mr. Speaker, a leaked cabinet briefing shows just how badly the UCP is losing the plot. The UCP government is on a new adventure to own natural gas pipelines in Alberta, creating two Crown corporations to centralize power, putting aside public money for lawsuits from private business and Indigenous nations. Albertans are dealing with rising costs, and what is this government doing? Wasting taxpayer money, creating more bureaucracy, and picking fights with industry. Why is the Premier doing this?

Mr. Jean: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's ironic coming from that party. They've never seen a bureaucracy they didn't like.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it's true that natural gas is absolutely critical to Alberta and Alberta's future. It's critical that we have had some challenges with it over the last period of time because of our growth and other issues. It's also true that we have taken it upon ourselves to fix the problem that has been plaguing us for years in relation to natural gas because it is so important. What we are going to do is keep the best interest of Albertans in mind every single step of the way because it is so critical and important. So if the member has something to add, please see me.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that this is chaos by design and the UCP is consolidating power at every turn – more power in ministers' offices, shutting Albertans out of decision-making, and now using its ill-advised gas royalty in kind program to take more control over the gas industry – given that the industry is clear that the UCP is competing with the private sector, is this what the Premier means by getting government out of the way? More government ownership, control, taxpayer risk: is this the national energy program 2.0, UCP style?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's natural gas vision and strategy is a plan for Alberta to become a global supplier of clean, affordable, sourced natural gas from across Alberta. This natural gas not only is clean and affordable – the most affordable gas probably in the world – but it also creates thousands upon thousands of great-paying jobs for Albertans. That member might like to go out to rural

Alberta and see what's actually happening there instead of just focusing on leaky pipes in Calgary.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that this government is creating two new Crown corporations to take control of natural gas pipelines behind closed doors without a clear mandate, given this is part of a bigger pattern: more power with ministers, less accountability, and taxpayers potentially footing the bill for lawsuits, just like the coal lawsuits. Albertans didn't sign up to take on more gamble with public money, so what safeguards has the Premier put in place to protect taxpayers from the financial and legal risk of her national energy program 2.0?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, that is very ironic that she would bring up the issue of coal lawsuits and what the NDP did with coal. They made a gong show out of it. We had to fix that problem. You might also notice that they continue to cost taxpayers millions upon millions of dollars every single year because of what they did with coal.

Now, there are lawsuits in relation to coal. Why is there no lawsuit in relation to what the Leader of the Opposition did with Calgary's water system, Mr. Speaker? That was negligence. There's nothing more important than water to the people of Alberta, and we're going to make sure that every single step of the way is safe for people and in the pipe. [interjections]

The Speaker: I know everybody has a glass of water on their desk. I'm not sure it's considered a prop, but that was in the neighbourhood.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold-Bar. [interjections] The hon. member is so popular, he gets a fresh 35. [interjections] I'll give him 50. Let him start.

It's 35; carry on.

2:40 Oil and Gas Well Liability Management

Mr. Schmidt: Yeah. Thank you very much. When MAGA Energy was forced to cease operations, Enoch Cree Nation was left with millions of dollars of cleanup liabilities, including sour gas and oil wells, pumpjacks, pipelines, contamination from spills, and more. They're also left with millions more in unpaid taxes, royalties, and leases. On October 26 Enoch Cree Nation wrote to the energy minister demanding that he investigate the matter. To the minister: will he?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, it's no surprise. I talked about coal; I'll now talk about what the NDP did not do to fix what became a problem under them and continued as a problem until recent years. What I will tell you is that the OWA has decommissioned more than 8,900 wells. We've received more than 4,100 reclamation certificates, another 3,700 other sites reclaimed and awaiting vegetation to be established. We're taking concrete steps towards this. There's going to be more information in the near future, and I will sit down with anybody to solve problems that the NDP and other governments caused over the years any time.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that MAGA Energy was in financial distress long before the Alberta Energy Regulator approved the transfer of hundreds of new licences to it and given that this transfer was initially blocked by the regulator but then when they were transferred, only 18 months afterwards MAGA was ordered to cease operations, to the minister: why did the regulator fail to protect the public and leave Enoch Cree Nation holding the bag for millions of dollars?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, you know, I can't take the blame for what the NDP did or didn't do in the past, but I can clearly tell you that we're taking concrete steps towards making sure that it never happens again. Just this morning I made an announcement in relation to, going forward, after six months from now there are going to be no wells in Alberta that are going to be drilled without an asset attachment to it, $50,000 or 1 per cent of the cost to drill, and then in 10 years enough money to clean up that well. That's something that we're doing. No other place in the world is doing that. We are leading the world on this file, and we will continue to do so.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that Alberta is leading the world in unpaid oil and gas liabilities and given that the Alberta Energy Regulator knew or should have known that MAGA had defaulted on its property tax payments in 2024 and given that the AER knew that MAGA had defaulted on its administrative fees and orphan well payments and given that according to its own rules the AER should never have approved the transfer to MAGA in the first place, what will the minister do to compensate Enoch Cree Nation for the costs of the mistakes that his regulator made?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, many companies in the oil and gas business actually do great things for the people of Alberta, employ tens of thousands of Albertans, clean up wells, and sometimes they fall behind in taxes and other things. We've taken some very aggressive positions on that. We're working well with the RMA and other organizations to make sure that these folks are accountable, but MAGA in particular and others have caught up and done good things up to a certain point and then get back into a bad position. We've taken a number of positions to strengthen the Crown's position over this in relation to assets, and we're going to continue to do that.

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

Members' Statements
(continued)

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

Electoral Boundaries

Member Miyashiro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, as much as we've spoken about the newest sham UCP boundaries plan, about how it appears to be rigging the map in favour of the UCP government, about how it dilutes urban and rural voter representation across the province, about how ridiculous it is that golf courses are now being used to determine communities of interest, there's still more to say about the real reason for the UCP's boundary shenanigans, which is to protect UCP ministers and MLAs.

The UCP rejected the work of Justice Miller's Electoral Boundaries Commission and forced through a do-over for clear partisan purposes. Justice Miller's plan reinstated the former Taber-Cardston-Warner riding, a big problem for the UCP, because that would mean the Government House Leader and MLA for the current Cardston-Siksika riding would have to face off for the UCP nomination against the minister of environment and current MLA for Taber-Warner. Mr. Speaker, pass the popcorn.

Under Justice Miller's plan the Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services and MLA for Lethbridge-East would have to run for re-election in the same seat he already represents. Why is that a problem, Mr. Speaker? Well, probably because most voters in Lethbridge are done with the UCP, so the UCP is planning to silence their votes. You get the picture.

In 2017 an NDP Premier was presented with a real, legal boundaries commission plan that eliminated the ridings of four NDP cabinet ministers. Did she like it? Of course not. But Premier Notley signed off on the plan without changes because it was the right thing to do. It was the legal thing to do. Is it too much to ask this Premier to do the same? Stop playing the political games with Albertans' right to vote and just do the right thing.

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

Member Ceci: In an article published yesterday in the *Calgary Herald*, Don Braid put the minister of service Alberta's Kentucky booze cruise in the pantheon of classic Conservative scandals. The Premier may have changed, but the clear disregard for taxpayers' dollars from Tory land to now remains the same. From Allison Redford's sky palace and inappropriate use of government planes and flight expenses to Jason Kenney's Alohagate and the rooftop whisky social, which I'll note involveed the now Finance minister imbibing in some Irish whisky on a rooftop while the rest of Albertans couldn't even visit their local pub, it's the latest in a not-so-proud UCP tradition: wasting the public's time, money, and patience on frivolous expenses and displays of arrogance.

The minister of service Alberta spent $5,400 of Albertans' money on a luxury You Sip, We Drive chauffeur service, including an in-vehicle cooler, complimentary tasting, and a fancy lunch at the famous Maker's Mark Distillery. As if this wasn't enough, he brought along his chief of staff's husband, failed UCP candidate Gary Davidson, and split Mr. Davidson's personal costs across his office expenses.

The grift did not stop at the minister's office. Per the UCP's policy all international travel requires sign-off by the Premier. This means that either the Premier turned a blind eye when the booze cruise cost ballooned to more than double the ministry's initial quote or the Premier saw no problem with her minister taking a taxpayer-funded distillery joyride.

It's very clear that the booze cruise is just one example of a larger problem. Just a few months later the globetrotting Davidsons were schmoozing in Washington with the Minister of Municipal Affairs, who still hasn't disclosed his flights or hotel expenses. Albertans expect better from their government. If history is any indication, for the UCP it's just going to get worse.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 42 Energy, Environment and Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2026

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 42, the Energy, Environment and Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2026.

Among other things, this proposed bill will set the highest standard in North America for what responsible data centre development looks like.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I hereby move first reading of Bill 42, the Energy, Environment and Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2026.

[Motion carried; Bill 42 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

2:50

Bill 215 Municipal Government (Reserve Land Use) Amendment Act, 2026

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce Bill 215, the Municipal Government (Reserve Land Use) Amendment Act, 2026.

Community recreation facilities improve physical and mental health, reduce social isolation, give children and youth positive places to grow, and widen access for people who face financial and other barriers, all while serving as local hubs that support local jobs, volunteerism, and neighbourhood vibrancy. Bill 215 proposes amendments to the Municipal Government Act that would empower municipalities to use community centre reserve land for nonprofit recreational centres.

Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of the Municipal Government (Reserve Land Use) Amendment Act, 2026.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 215 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a report from Egale Canada and Dr. Corinne Mason, Dr. Leah Hamilton, and Jamie Anderson, and it is titled Parental Reports on the Impacts of Anti-Trans Laws in Alberta.

Thank you very much.

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

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a letter that I referenced yesterday during bill debate from Lisa, a constituent from Calgary-Edgemont, to the Premier and I. It is titled Serious Concerns and Opposition to Bill 35. I hope she gets a response.

The Speaker: Are there any other tablings? I see none.

Okay. That takes us to points of order. The first one was noted at 1:55 p.m. It was called by the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition at the time was stupid, but at the same time I'm just going to withdraw anyways.

The Speaker: Okay. Well, that deals with that. It's withdrawn.

The next point of order was called at 1:59 p.m. by the Deputy Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Sabir: I think at that time the government was stupid, but I will withdraw it as well.

The Speaker: The next point of order was called at 2:08 p.m. by the Deputy Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rising pursuant to 23(h), (i), (j) and basically every decent, I guess, parliamentary tradition. At that point the Government House Leader said something to the effect that the member opposite needs to stop lying. Those were his words. I think there are many rulings about the word "lying," the use of the word "lying" in this Chamber. Also, he may argue that he just said it about plural, said it about the collective of the caucus, but I think what you cannot say directly to a member you cannot

hide behind this, that you said it for the collective. This is clearly out of order, and I hope that you rule so.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will say that according to my notes at 2:07, it indicated that the Government House Leader did mention members in the plural in his comment, not identifying any one individual. I leave this in your capable hands, but this is not about an individual. This was about the group as a whole.

The Speaker: Well, here's what's interesting. I kind of agree with what both sides said on this. Here's what the Blues say, for all the folks watching at home and those of us here, too: "We will continue to consult, but the members opposite need to stop lying about this." One could technically say that's not a point of order because the hon. minister did not identify an individual and say they were lying, but I think this was definitely designed to cause disorder in the House, so on that basis I'm going to ask the hon. minister to stand up and apologize and withdraw.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to stand up. I did say what I said, but I will withdraw and I will apologize.

The Speaker: The next point of order is at 2:18 p.m., called by the Deputy Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order
Parliamentary Language

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again 23(h), (i), and (j) and again the Government House Leader. At 2:18 he said that members come here to mislead this Chamber with false information. Again the same thing: if it's not against one member, it's certainly the language that is used to create disorder in this House, and it's abusive to everyone to kind of suggest that members come to this Chamber to mislead anyone with false information. Clearly, that's out of order.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, here I will disagree with the Deputy Opposition House Leader. When the government or any member of this House says that another member has misled, it doesn't necessarily imply a motive of intentionally trying to mislead the way "lying" would. Of course, "providing false information" doesn't speak to that as well. These are the proper and appropriate historically accepted parliamentary ways of making the point that that information is not accurate.

This is a substantive part of debate, disagreeing with the other side. Saying that when the other side made a point that was not accurate, that was misleading: that is not the case. Here is the case. This is the nature of debate. This is how we debate back and forth. This was different in kind to the previous point of order.

I will note as well, because this does add substance, it was "members opposite" again. On both points, Mr. Speaker, I believe this is not a point of order and that this is part of the fruitful debate of disagreeing between different sides of a political debating Chamber.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. Hon. members, the Deputy Government House Leader is, I think, correct in that this is not the same as the previous one. This is one of those points, folks, where you always say: Speaker, consider the context. I've tried to consider the context in both cases. What that means: to a certain degree you're stuck with my opinion. Sorry about that, but there's no one else here to do that.

The first time I thought it was definitely provocative and intended to cause disorder. This was debate. This is making a statement that what was said by the other side was misleading and false. It's a matter of debate. We accuse each other of doing that on all sides. It's part of healthy debate. It's part of ongoing debate. It indicates to those people watching that the government side and the opposition side don't believe or don't agree on what was said. So this is not a point of order.

This matter is dealt with.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders
Third Reading

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction, who conveniently is on his feet.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move third reading of Bill 34, the Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2026.

Bill 34 is about consumer protection. The Alberta government has an obligation to protect Albertans from bad actors. When that bad actor happens to be a municipal politician who spends more money on bike lanes and art projects than investing in infrastructure, that's a problem. Yet that is what the city of Calgary is in right now; 1.6 million Calgarians are rationing water. We have to ask ourselves: was this wilful negligence or blind incompetence? We don't know, but what we do know is that that caucus can never lead this province when they have that level of incompetence involved. That's why consumer protection is important, because we have to protect Albertans from bad actors.

Now, I want to thank members on all sides of this House for their debate on this important legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I believe Albertans deserve a government that stands up for them, protects their interests, and makes their life easier. When the rules aren't working for Albertans, it's our job to fix them. That's exactly what we're doing with this legislation.

3:00

We're strengthening consumer protections, giving Albertans more control over the things they own, and putting common sense back into the rules they deal with every day because when Albertans spend their hard-earned money, they deserve to know that someone has their back. Take buying a vehicle. For many Albertans it's one of the biggest purchases they'll make. If someone spends tens of thousands of dollars on a vehicle that can't be fixed, they shouldn't be stuck with the bill. That's why we are proposing lemon law protections that would give Albertans clear options to seek a refund, replacement, or other remedy when serious problems persist.

The same common sense applies to repairing the things that we own. If you buy something, you should have a say in who fixes it. We're laying the groundwork for right-to-repair protections that would give Albertans better access to the parts, tools, and information they need. Mr. Speaker, this is especially important for our farmers. When equipment breaks down in the middle of harvest, farmers can't afford to sit around waiting for someone to fix it. Every hour matters when you're trying to get a crop off the field. I

don't want another harvest where an Alberta farmer is left waiting to repair equipment that they own because they can't access the parts, tools, or information that they need.

Mr. Speaker, we're going to define which consumer products will apply to right to repair in the regulations, but I want to give you an example. If you have a hot water heater that just comes off warranty and it's still working but it only works well enough to produce enough hot water for a three-minute shower, we know that's a problem. Nobody in Alberta should have to live through a three-minute shower because they don't have the right to repair. For that reason, I'm committed to moving forward quickly on the regulations that will put these protections into place.

That urgency extends to our other consumer protection measures. I don't want these changes sitting on a shelf. I want regulations developed as quickly as possible so Albertans can benefit from these protections. Mr. Speaker, nobody should have to wait until a fraudster opens an account in their name before they take action. We're giving Albertans the ability to freeze their credit and help stop fraud before it happens.

We're also taking action on ticket resales. Albertans deserve to know the real price of a ticket before they pay for it. We're requiring clearer price breakdowns and giving government the ability to consider additional protections, including caps on resale markups. There are practical, common-sense changes that put Albertans first, and we're bringing that same approach to landowners and businesses.

We're re-establishing the Surface Rights Board because landowners deserve a dedicated place to resolve disputes over their property without unnecessary delays. Landowners deserve fair treatment and timely decisions when problems arise on their land.

We're also cutting outdated red tape that gets in the way of local businesses. That includes testing lottery ticket sales in up to 30 liquor stores, giving businesses new opportunities while we evaluate the results.

Mr. Speaker, some people might ask whether stronger consumer protections mean more red tape, and I see it differently. For businesses that play by the rules and treat their customers fairly, these protections are common sense.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Our job is to protect Albertans, hold bad actors accountable, and get unnecessary government barriers out of the way. That's the balance we're striking with this legislation, and passing this legislation is only the beginning. I want these protections brought into force as quickly as we possibly can because Albertans deserve real protections and a government that is prepared to stand up for them. And when things go wrong, I want Albertans to know: we have your back.

With that, Madam Speaker, I urge all members to support third reading of the Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2026. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Sorry. Just before we go to the Government House Leader, Minister, can you just clarify that you moved third reading?

Mr. Nally: I did. Very first paragraph.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Perfect. Thank you.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: He opened and he closed, Madam Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise today to speak in favour of Bill 34, the Service Alberta Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2026. Now, Madam Speaker, I rise today briefly to speak on this in favour and to support the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction in his endeavour and his tireless – tireless – fight to cut red tape for the province of Alberta.

It's important to note, Madam Speaker, that cutting red tape doesn't always just mean cutting funding. Now, it can save money, but it means getting government out of the way. And it's no secret that on this side of the House we have actively gone after red tape, starting with the minister, the Member for Taber-Warner, who set a good legacy for all those who have succeeded him.

Madam Speaker, what this is really about is making sure that the rules in the province of Alberta are fair and they're transparent, unlike what we've seen from the members opposite, particularly the Leader of the Opposition, who decided to withhold information from his own city council – his own city council – his colleagues. Now, in this Chamber, it has been ruled out of order to say that a member has lied, and that is correct. I myself, even in recent memory, have apologized for saying such words, but I can tell you that to mislead your colleagues deliberately would be something that would be totally out of order, now or in the past. That's why the red tape reduction bill is about being transparent with Albertans and letting them know what our priorities are, which are making sure that there's a clear path for businesses to operate here, jobs to be created, investment to be had.

If you look at a report that was recently tabled, it clearly indicated that the Leader of the Opposition did not share the report with the city council colleagues, which could have spared Calgarians the chaos of repeated water main breaks. If I was the Leader of the Opposition, every time I woke up in the morning, I would have a sense of dread, worry that another water main has broken because of his own negligence.

Now, when you're talking about Bill 34, it's about being clear with the rules, setting a clear expectation for businesses who are potentially going to invest millions of dollars in the city of Calgary or other places where they know the critical infrastructure is going to be maintained: water pipelines, roads, bridges.

Now, Madam Speaker, today the concern in Calgary is about water, and I ask questions to members like the Member for Calgary-Varsity. What are her constituents saying? Is she the envy of the constituents of Calgary-Varsity because today that member got to have a shower longer than three minutes? What about the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall? Another member who's been in this Chamber for more than one term, who knows well what public consultation is about, though his leader calls it a sham. What do his constituents think about a three-minute shower?

Now, when it comes to Bill 34, I can tell you, Madam Speaker . . .

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

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

Point of Order
Relevance

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 23(b), (i), and there are other standing orders that are applicable. First and foremost, I think that at third reading of a bill we talk about the bill in its final form after it has gone through a clause-by-clause analysis at the committee stage, and we talk about the bill in its final stage. We do not take that as an opportunity to character assassinate other members of this House and go on rants about showers and whatnot and ask individual people how long they took a shower this morning or that morning in Calgary. That's completely irrelevant to this bill, to this Chamber, and that's just, I guess, UCP rhetoric and talking

points which should have no place in bill debate for Bill 34. I think the Government House Leader knows better than this.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Disagree.

The Deputy Speaker: You know, it's so funny because both sides of the House end up making the same arguments about each other all of the time. Members of the opposition have engaged in long debates that have nothing to do with the matter at hand and loosely somehow tie them, and that seems to be okay, generally. The government does it; it's not okay, and vice versa.

This is sort of where we're at right now. The Government House Leader has been talking for about three and a half minutes. He's definitely referenced the bill in this case. I know his remarks will make sense to the bill at hand, which is third reading of Bill 34, and I will allow him to continue.

The hon. Government House Leader.

3:10 **Debate Continued**

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As you noted, I have referenced the bill multiple times in the context of our red tape reduction efforts and the tireless efforts of the minister of red tape reduction to create a clear path for success for businesses and investors in the province of Alberta, which is coincidentally the ministry that I oversee.

Now, the reason why I talk about this is that in addition to a clear path to approval, a clear path to permit, businesses look at the province of Alberta and they say: what about the most basic fundamental services that we require to succeed? What I'm talking about in this context is things like water. If I come to Alberta and I set up a plant or something in Calgary – let's say I'm a bottling company for soda – do you think, Madam Speaker, that I need reliable, stable water? I would say so. I mean, it would follow logically – wouldn't it? – to members opposite that if I was setting up a bottling company and the government has put in measures to reduce barriers for success, I would want the most fundamental basic services to be available, like water. So it begs the question for successive leaders in the city of Calgary: what are your priorities? What are the things you care most about? Is it pet projects like tunnels at the airport or blue rings or towers over by the Canada Olympic Park, or is it the most critical infrastructure that people rely upon?

I mean, I remember it wasn't that long ago, right before Calgary Stampede, there was a water notice put on. What do you think the hotels in the city of Calgary were saying? Those are businesses. Do you think that they want to tell their patrons coming in and checking in, who are here for a great time, that the world's greatest outdoor show on earth now doesn't have water? Absurd, Madam Speaker. But here's the bigger question. If the water infrastructure isn't there and it was ignored, what were the real priorities? What was more important than water?

The next question I would ask to the members opposite is: what else was ignored? What else was ignored, Madam Speaker? If I'm a business and I'm looking at Bill 34 and I'm saying: what are the new rules of engagement for investment in the province of Alberta? I'm talking about making sure that we've got transparency on ticket sales and fleet vehicles that I could purchase for my company so that my employees can get around the province and sell our products, that those vehicles aren't lemons, that I'm protected. There's a level of certainty for businesses saying: "I feel good about investing in Alberta. I feel good about expanding my operations in the province because the province introduced legislation that protects a depreciating asset like a vehicle to make sure I'm not left hanging in the wings, paying not only for depreciation but also for repairs."

But what about the other stuff? What about if one of those vehicles is crossing a bridge and that bridge is on the verge of collapse because a successive or previous leader or mayor of the city of Calgary decided to ignore a report that said that certain infrastructure isn't taking priority over blue rings, tunnels, and towers over by the Canada Olympic Park? Madam Speaker, that is what shakes investor confidence.

What restores it is a government who focuses particularly on removing red tape and barriers to ensure that the rules are clear, the rules are transparent, and engagement can happen. Without that, it's just chaos and anarchy, and that's what the four years of the members opposite created. They drove businesses, they drove investment, they drove jobs out of the province, and they did it willingly to the point that they had the audacity to tell them to go to another province. They had the audacity to tell the people to walk or take the bus.

Madam Speaker, I can tell you the vehicle that I own: I rely upon that vehicle, for it not to be a lemon. Legislation like this, the antilemon legislation: that gives me the confidence knowing that what I have is going to work when I need it most so that I can get to my constituents that are in some cases three hours away. But when it comes to reliability, you have to be able to rely on the most basic services and need a government that prioritizes that, not leaders who focus on destroying the economy and telling others to leave the province to go somewhere else to find a job. So the choice is clear. You can vote for Bill 34, and you can support red tape reduction, support the efforts of the government, support transparency, support predictability, and continue to establish Alberta as the premier destination for investment, to raise a family, to start a business. Or you can vote against Bill 34, and you can say that you care very little for the future of this province, that you care more about pet projects and social licence and the woke conversations of the day, and in doing so you will drive this province into the ground.

Madam Speaker, that is what the members opposite are trying to do. They ridicule and they mock the working-class people, they mock the blue-collar workers, the tradespeople who literally, with their hands, build this province and the critical infrastructure on which we rely. They ridicule the students that we consult in our education system to better understand what their priorities are so that when they graduate high school or graduate postsecondary, they have an opportunity to get meaningful employment that provides dignity, pays for mortgages, pays for food on the table, pays for gas in the vehicle, gas that is now cheaper because we cut the fuel tax.

In closing, I'll simply say this. The choice is very clear. You can vote for this bill and in doing so support the government's efforts to create a clear path and transparent path for success in this province, or you can side with the members opposite and a legacy of debt, destruction, and dumb decisions. With that, Madam Speaker, I'll conclude my remarks.

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

Member Gurinder Brar: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was listening very carefully to the minister of service Alberta and the Government House Leader talking about a couple of things. The minister of service Alberta was mentioning about bad actors. He was mentioning about red tape, and the Government House Leader was talking about the orders of the House and hiding information. So allow me to talk about that first of all.

So bad actors. You know who the real bad actor is?

The Deputy Speaker: We very quickly got into this game, and I would hate to pretend to know what you're going to say next, but

before we go down there, because other members of your caucus clearly are having some issues . . . [interjections] I'm speaking, not you.

This is not potentially a productive use of our time. Speaking to comments that other members have made as a speech in general sometimes is useful, sometimes is not. We're not commenting on other people's comments. We are commenting on the legislation in its final phase, general remarks, as we've been through other phases of this bill already. I'm going to give you that caution.

I love when you speak; you have wonderful stories to tell. I think the Chamber enjoys it very much. I'm not sure that's where you're going right now, but I'm just going to give you that caution because a speech based on comments of other members in this House is not helpful. But I'm sure you'll find a creative way to say what you have to say.

Member Gurinder Brar: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was talking about the legislation that is going to impact my constituents and the stakeholders that I've been meeting with, and I was going to comment on the bad actors that are there in the market, and one of those bad actors is this UCP government. When we talk about health care, we have seen that the wait times went up under this bad-actor government. We have seen a two-tier health care system that has been imported from down south of the border from Donald Trump, and that is something that Albertans would call a bad actor. There is a corrupt care scandal that happened right under the nose of this government, and they have failed to launch a public inquiry into that. That's what a bad actor would do.

3:20

If I talk about education, there are no schools in the communities that I represent. That's what a bad actor would do. Alberta has the lowest per-student funding in the country. That's what a bad actor would do. No schools on the ground even after they have announced multiple times. That's what a bad actor would do. There was a teacher's strike that was crushed in a single day with Bill 2. That's what a bad actor would do. A curriculum that removed antiracism, a curriculum that was criticized not just in Alberta but in the Northwest Territories, who dumped Alberta's curriculum and adopted B.C.'s curriculum. That's what a bad actor would do.

If we talk about employment, the highest youth unemployment rate in Canada is in Alberta. That's what a bad actor would do. Twenty-four thousand jobs were lost in the last month. Again, an accomplishment of a bad actor. And not a single pipeline to the coast in the past 50 years under this government. That is what a bad actor actually looks like. And wasted more than $200 million on a referendum – a divisive, wasteful, and separatist referendum – that no one asked for: that's what a bad actor would do.

It's funny when they talk about red tape. All of this is red tape. When patients sit in the waiting rooms of emergency halls waiting for hours so that they can get a basic checkup from a doctor, that is red tape for them. When I talked to my constituents, a student living right in front of the school can't go to the particular school because the school is operating at a hundred per cent capacity. That is red tape for that student. And when a young graduate who has recently graduated has paid all his tuition costs and is ready to pay back the loan, is trying to find employment but can't find a job because of the policies of this government, that's red tape for that particular student, Madam Speaker. So if we are really serious, if this government is really serious about cutting red tape, these are the red tapes they need to cut.

Madam Speaker, there were also discussions about priorities of government. The priorities should be to make sure life is affordable for Albertans. The priorities should be more schools in our communities.

The Deputy Speaker: All right. It's time to get going back to what's in the content of the bill.

Member Gurinder Brar: Thank you, Madam Speaker. When I'm talking about affordability, that's what right to repair actually means because there are products out there in the community, in the market, where if we want to get them repaired from the manufacturer, they do get – it is a huge bill. The right to repair addresses that. That's what I was talking about when I talk about affordability, and when I talk about cutting red tape, that is what this bill is about. That is what I have heard from the other side about cutting red tape.

Madam Speaker, if I want to dig into Bill 34, there are three specific things that this bill targets. The first one is about consumer protection. The second one is about the lottery ticket pilot project. The third one is about the re-establishment of the surface rights tribunal.

Madam Speaker, the first one is consumer protection charges. That deals with four major concerns. The first one is about the defective vehicles. There are organizations out there who have been advocating for changes in this particular part of the bill because the issue is that modern vehicles are not just metal, screws, engine. They have software embedded in them, and it is really difficult for customers to get those repairs done outside of the manufacturers, outside of the automotive dealerships. When they go to the dealerships, it is really expensive to get those repairs because only those manufacturers have the access to bypass those codes so that they can get those repairs done. Organizations, grassroots advocacy groups have been advocating to make sure that a person should be able to go out and get those repairs done without having to lose their warranty. That would save people a lot of money. That is about affordability.

Canadians have always had the freedom to choose where they get their vehicles serviced or fixed, but due to software, due to modern technology, that ability to choose is not valid anymore. It is extremely difficult these days for people to actually go out and get their vehicles repaired.

Investing in a vehicle is a big investment, not just for an individual but for an entire family. People save, working multiple jobs so that they can buy the vehicle, but once that vehicle is broken down or is creating any issues, it is difficult for anyone to get it repaired. I'm glad that this bill establishes lemon laws, but we need to do more.

Lots of things we will be seeing in regulations. Since we are debating the framework of the bill without having to look into the details of the regulations of the bill, Madam Speaker, I would ask the minister to meet with these stakeholders. I have met with them, and they have shared some genuine concerns with me. I would request the minister and the government to meet with those stakeholders and listen to those issues that they're sharing so that when regulations will be decided – we don't know when – that feedback and those comments and those concerns must be kept into account so that people can save money, people can get their vehicles fixed and repaired.

The second is the lottery ticket pilot project, which is pretty simple, straightforward, Madam Speaker. It is a pilot project that is going ahead, and I think that all members of the Assembly do support that.

The third part is the re-establishment of the surface rights tribunal, which is, again, pretty simple, straightforward.

The other important part that we are talking about is the right to repair, Madam Speaker, from the toothbrush to the cars and everything in between. We have seen that they have modern technology in those, they have software embedded in those. The parts, the screws, for instance, those are also very complex, and to fix those, we have to take them to those manufacturers. Those products are made in such a way that only manufacturers will be able to open them and get those fixed. I think that that should not be the case. If we own something, we should be able to repair it. It's that simple and straightforward, and that's how it should be.

3:30

I have met with a couple of stakeholders who have brought forward some important points that I want to share. First and foremost is about the products that they call parts pairing. I'll try to simplify it. Let's say that I buy a smart phone, and then there is the other part that attaches to that phone which is external to that phone, and I need software. If the manufacturer doesn't authorize that pairing, it doesn't happen. It's only the manufacturer who has the authority to allow the parts pairing. What I would suggest to this government and to this minister is that the parts pairing component should be considered very carefully because we don't want people to have the rights just on paper; we want people to be able to actually benefit from the piece of legislation. Parts pairing is something that the stakeholders have been raising concerns about.

The other thing that they have mentioned is that, let's say, I buy a product and the manufacturer assumes that the tools needed to fix that product are available in the market so they won't be able to supply me with those tools. It is based on their assumption that the tools are available, but how readily they are available is another question. Are those specific tools readily available to fix that product? If not, then how do we tackle that assumption that those tools are available? That is another thing that the stakeholders are raising concerns about. I would suggest that the minister actually look into these important considerations, look into this important feedback, and then move forward with the regulations.

The third thing about right to repair is that we need to make sure that the repair is actually affordable. Let's say if I have equipment or a product, if I need to replace it or if I need to repair it, if it is costing me $700 to repair it versus $850 or $900 to buy a new one, then there is no point for me to repair the product if I could buy it at an almost similar price in the market. So we need to make sure that we strengthen this legislation in a way that it is affordable for Albertans; it is affordable for the customers and consumers.

Then I would like to mention about credit protections, Madam Speaker. My colleague from Edmonton-Meadows brought forward a private member's bill about credit protections, and a number of colleagues on both sides of the House have mentioned their stories about credit protections. My colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie shared a story about a family trying to buy a house, but they were not able to do that just because their credit score was messed up, with no fault of their own but because of somebody else, another bad actor out there. He has shared how difficult it was for that family to get their credit score fixed. Dealing with the credit monitoring companies is difficult.

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

Member Batten: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my honour to join debate on Bill 34, Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2026. I want to, first, start by congratulating the Member for Calgary-Currie in that her amazing private member's bill is being represented in here, which of course she had brought forward in the spring, providing transparency for Albertans. I'm delighted to see it in here. It is really too bad that Albertans didn't have the same protection in the spring, but I'm delighted that the UCP government decided to reconsider and was able to, well, identify really good legislation. Although they weren't able to take it directly from us – what's the expression, Madam Speaker? – imitation is the largest form of flattery. I believe it is, so we'll take it. Yeah.

I also want to give a shout-out to our Member for Edmonton-Meadows. His private member's bill, Bill 210, on credit protection is also inside this bill, so I want to give just as much praise as I can for these incredibly important legislators who did a lot of great work. I am delighted again that the government has reconsidered their prior decisions.

Now, what I really want to discuss here specifically, Madam Speaker, is the enabling of lottery tickets being sold in liquor stores. The reason I bring that up . . . [interjections] Well, first of all, I'm not sure who asked for this, and I understand that maybe the government wants to join debate, but I'm pretty sure they already had time.

Mr. Schow: I did. I already spoke. You're right.

Member Batten: So that's great if, you know, there would be some respect across here.

Who asked for lottery tickets to be sold in liquor stores? I'm guessing it's not the everyday Albertan, so I'd love to know who it is they actually consulted with because this is not the priority by any means of any constituent I've ever spoken to. Yeah. It's completely off base.

Further, every time – I shouldn't say every time, Madam Speaker. Frequently when debate inside this House moves into, I'll say, a silly place, our offices are inundated with hundreds if not thousands of e-mails concerned about it. Let me tell you, the gambling advertisements that are all over the place I hear about constantly. Not one single constituent in support of it. All incredibly concerned that, one, the government is wasting money pushing a product that is not actually particularly healthy for Albertans, and, second of all, that the safeguards for anyone vulnerable to addictions just don't exist. They just don't do it.

You don't have to take my word for it. I want to share a few words from my constituents. In this one, the minister: it was actually directed to him and I was copied on it, so I know the minister has obviously read and been briefed on this e-mail, but let me remind:

> It's government's responsibility to intervene when there is public risk. We did it with tobacco, we did it with alcohol, and we most recently did it with cannabis advertising. It's time to put people before profit.

And then he goes a little bit further and says:

> Ban gambling and sports betting advertising. The evidence and data are clear. The experts have weighed in, and now it's time to act.

I mean that is one of, again like I said, thousands of e-mails that are coming into all of our offices. We know the minister has heard the feedback from Albertans that they don't want to see gambling advertised on the radio, when they stream music, when they stream movies or shows. They don't want to see it. They're not interested. And now to have this bill go even further and be like: "You know what? That is not enough. We are now going to put gambling inside of our liquor stores." Yeah. Because, I mean, why not? Why not?

Another e-mail from a constituent: "I'm wondering what the benefit of allowing an open market for gambling ads is. Will the province take stock and monitor gambling addiction? They have taken over the radio and all social media." I think that's a really fair question. You can't introduce – well, correction. A responsible government wouldn't introduce something that is as risky as this without actually investing in safeguards but, you know, here we are.

Another e-mail from a constituent:

> I do not struggle with gambling addiction personally, but I have friends that have dealt with it and these e-mails are perfectly targeted for people who are trying to get over those issues. With the growing popularity of sports betting and youth, these issues will only continue to be more widespread. I'm not entirely sure how these things are regulated, but I do believe there needs to be a change here because what these companies are doing is like waving a tequila shot in front of a recovering alcoholic in hopes of getting them to come back to the bar every day.

We have been discussing booze cruises inside this space. We have been discussing how the government doesn't have the priorities of Albertans remotely up front. We have discussed how this government continues to invest in things that aren't useful for Albertans. This is a clear example of where it's actually very harmful for Albertans.

Why is it that when we're in an affordability crisis, when we have a world that is a little topsy-turvy right now, why is it that the government has decided that their biggest priority is inserting lottery tickets into liquor stores? Like, it just mind-boggles, and I don't have an answer for my constituents, Madam Speaker. I don't. Absolutely, we forward and we share these things with the ministry to figure out – okay. So explain. Taxpayers want to know. Albertans want to know. Why is this the priority? Because, and I quote from another constituent: "This is a contradiction in public health policy and needs urgent attention."

3:40

Madam Speaker, it's really difficult to pinpoint where inside our public health care system this government is investing and in exactly what: my constituent is asking for. Better yet, why are they introducing something that is known to be harmful? Full stop. Like, it's just really interesting to me. This just doesn't make sense, and the debate that we've heard from that side hasn't provided any insight either. It'd be really interesting. I would love or I'm excited to see come estimates, come budget: who's paying for these ads exactly? Because they're really expensive.

All that money could probably go to – I don't know – our schools, which is actually a great point to discuss as well. Because instead of empowering our youth, we have decided – pardon me. We have not decided; the government has decided to remove math and science, social studies, and English from grade 12. But don't worry because the minute they turn 18 and are legally allowed inside a liquor store, well, there are lottery tickets. Cool.

None of that sets our youth up for success. As mentioned in the House the other day, Alberta has one of the highest unemployment rates for youth. How is inserting lottery tickets into liquor stores helping that? How does removing math, science, social studies, and English from a curriculum that is supposed to set our students up for success provide them the ability to have critical thought, to actually analyze things for themselves, to not simply believe whatever it is that they're told or that the government spews? Honestly, Madam Speaker, this is wild.

I want to share a story because it's beyond the paintbrush of all of our learners as of, whatever, 2028, that grade 12 will not require these specific courses. I don't know about you, Madam Speaker, but I know a lot of people who, you know, in their 20s have a career, and in their 30s they decide on something different. They have a high school degree, and maybe they have a degree in something else, and that's great, but in order to enter the program of interest, they suddenly have to come up with high school credits because they didn't take chemistry in grade 12, for instance. Who pays for that? Yeah. They do, so not only are we setting kids up to fail; we are also making their lives more expensive. Like, it is mind-boggling. I'm not sure why this government is focused on this.

I want to share another thing from my amazing constituents:

> In 2023-24 Alberta generated over $1.5 billion in gambling revenue with Play Alberta alone accounting for approximately $179 million. These figures reflect a government that not only profits from gambling; it greatly profits at the expense of those who cannot afford it.

I mean, that sums it up. There might be some good things in this bill because they came from a private member's bill on this side, but lottery tickets inside liquor stores is not a priority. It's not a smart move right now, Madam Speaker. And with that, I 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 3:45 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

Against the motion:

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

Totals: For – 0 Against – 55

[Motion to adjourn debate lost unanimously]

The Speaker: It's nice to just see unanimity in the House at any point in the day.

Now that we've agreed not to adjourn debate, would anybody like to speak to Bill 34?

An Hon. Member: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 34 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

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

Bill 38
Advanced Education Statutes Amendment Act, 2026

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? I have the Member for Calgary-North East.

Mr. Stephan: Tell us a story.

4:00

Member Gurinder Brar: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Members opposite have been asking for stories, and on this bill there are thousands of stories, stories of the students who are wondering why this government has always increased their tuition costs and has made their lives difficult. I have met so many students in my constituency. When I go out door-knocking or when we hold town halls, even at community events, young people always come up to us and tell their stories that the only possible way for them to succeed in their life is to get advanced education – in fact, education – and get a job that can

support their families, that they can pay their student loans, that they can make sure that they have a roof on top of their head and food on the table for themselves and their families. That's what we are hearing from students.

What we have also heard is that recently, under this government, this possibility is overshadowed with the dark clouds of increasing tuition costs. This possibility is no longer in their reach. Students have shared their experiences that they have worked multiple jobs. Their parents have picked up extra shifts. Even in the riding that I represent there are multigenerational families. Even the grandparents have worked, picked up some jobs to make sure that they can save the money for the tuition costs that have continuously gone up so that they can send their grandkids, their kids to the best possible educational institutions, whether that be for the trades, whether that be for medical schools or law schools, and make sure that the future of their next generations is bright.

And they all expect that all of us, irrespective of political affiliation, should come together to make sure that education is accessible, is affordable, and is within the reach of those students. Unfortunately, we have seen the exact opposite under this government. In some courses tuition costs have doubled. If I compare between 2000 and 2023, even 2020 and '23, there have been many courses where students have really struggled to pay the cost of the tuition.

Mr. Chair, it's not just about money; it is about mental health as well. When students work hard and still struggle to pay for the tuition costs, that impacts their mental health, and that impacts their performance in the class. If a student sitting in a class is worried about the tuition costs for the next semester or the next course, how will that student actually focus on what is being taught in the class?

It's not just that their tuition costs have gone up. Other basic items like groceries, insurance costs, utilities: they have all gone up. And the most important thing is that when this government came to power in 2019, they reduced the minimum wage for these young folks. They reduced it from $15 to $13. Now they are left in a situation where their wages were decreased by $2 an hour. The grocery costs went up, insurance costs went up, utilities went up, and their parents' other expenses, cost of living, have gone up. Now tuition costs have also gone up.

Instead of making sure that life is affordable for all Albertans, instead of making sure that grocery costs go down, utilities should go down, tuition costs should go down, we have a government that is focused on culture wars, we have a government that is more focused on the flags in the schools, and we have a government that is not lifting a finger to make life affordable for all Albertans. It is their job to do that. That's what they were elected to do, from seniors who are complaining about rising costs to the average family in my riding, Mr. Chair.

The insurance cost was quoted at $21,000. If a family is paying $21,000 for insurance on top of groceries, on top of utility bills, on top of reduced wages, how do we expect that the student will be able to go to school and focus on what is being taught in the classroom? It has become a mental health issue for people. Instead of finding a proper solution, which is funding the postsecondary institutions, which is giving decent living wages to people, this government is focused on changing the funding formulas, on banning flags, on other culture wars. How are all these things going to solve the problems that families are facing?

Under this bill the cost does not come down. Education doesn't become affordable. Student loans won't be paid off easily. And those young minds' futures, young people's futures will be at risk. Today we have an advantage of having amazing, talented young people in our province. Many other jurisdictions in Canada and across the globe once had that opportunity, had that asset, but not all of them were able to utilize that. Quebec lost that advantage. Japan lost that advantage. China is losing that advantage. It is not something that we will be having forever. We will be regretting it if we lose this advantage. Why would we want Albertans, why would we want the young minds to regret when the train has left the platform?

Our job today is to make sure that the lives and the futures of this young population are secure, stable, and prosperous, and we as elected members have the moral responsibility to make sure that their future is prosperous. These bills don't help them. This bill has nothing in it that will help those young people, and we are wasting time debating things that we shouldn't be talking about at all. We shouldn't be talking about books in libraries. We shouldn't be talking about flags in schools. We shouldn't be talking about the culture wars or political neutrality or whatever that means in universities.

4:10

We should be laser focused on making education affordable, we should be laser focused on creating more job opportunities for those young people, and we should be laser focused on making sure that the future is affordable. Mr. Chair, when we don't encourage young people to go to schools, to go to universities, when we create barriers like this bill for young people, they will choose not to be in university. They will choose not to go to school. They will choose not to be the next generation tradesmen.

We are already facing shortages. I mean, we can go to any shopping outlet. We can talk to any business out there in the communities. All of them, whether it is a small business, whether it is a medium scale or even large companies, are facing labour shortages. Our health care system is already facing huge shortages of health care workers. If we make it expensive for any young person to go to university, how are we going to address that shortage?

It's not just about money. It is about the future of the province. The government has the money. Today I heard the Minister of Finance saying that he will be sharing a surplus report in the next few days. Sure, it is good news, but having money in the government bank account doesn't help the kids trying to get the best education. It is the job of the government to invest that money in future generations. We all know that when we invest in education, we save money in the justice system later on.

It's not just about investing, Mr. Chair. Education is not an expense. It is an investment, and it's not just about an investment either. It is a freedom issue. Education gives you freedom. Employment gives you freedom. As I was talking yesterday as well about "true north, strong and free," we can't be free from poverty, we can't be free from unemployment, we can't be free from homelessness unless we have a strong public education system, unless we have a strong public health care system, unless we have strong investments in our public service sector.

Being "true north, strong and free" is not just about a slogan or it's not just wording in our national anthem. It's not just about a talking point that we do at community events and on stages. It is a commitment that we must invest in the public education system and make sure that every young mind who is willing to go to university, who is putting in effort, gets a fair shot. It is about making sure that education should not be your liability in terms of paying off loans. Education should be your asset in terms of making sure you can use it to build a better future for yourself and for your families.

When we go back to our constituencies – I mean, it's not just about this side or that side; it's about all of us – how are we going to tell our constituents? How are we going to look into their eyes and say how Bill 38 will make their lives affordable? How will it reduce tuition costs? This bill is about lifting the cap that we have on tuition costs. It is not about lowering tuition costs.

This government commissioned a panel led by Jack Mintz, who is a University of Calgary economist. It's called the Mintz report, that was presented to this government with 11 recommendations, and one of those was to adopt a new formula with three components in it. One of the recommendations was to make sure that tuition costs would not increase by more than 2 per cent per year during the duration of the program.

Mr. Chair, when I came as an international student, tuition costs kept going up every semester. I remember when Rachel Notley became Premier in 2015, and stability was provided to me that my tuition costs would not go up for another year. That was done when oil prices were at almost $18 to $20. Now this government has billions of dollars, yet they are refusing to provide stability to students. Still they are not committing funding to postsecondary institutions.

Not only postsecondary institutions; they're not even committing to build new schools in the riding that I represent. From 2019 till today it's been seven years. Guess how many schools in my riding.

Member Batten: Zero.

Member Gurinder Brar: You guessed it right.

Zero schools, Mr. Chair. Seven years, and it's the fastest growing community in the entire Alberta. One of the communities is Cornerstone, and it will have 40,000 people when it will be fully developed; 40,000 people just in one community. The number of schools in that community: zero. Redstone: zero. Cityscape: zero. Livingston: zero. The last school that was built in my riding was built under Rachel Notley, and now the kid living right in front of that school is not able to access that school.

4:20

The Deputy Chair: Are there others? I will recognize the Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is my honour to speak to Bill 38, the Advanced Education Statutes Amendment Act, 2026, in Committee of the Whole. This bill is grounded in a straightforward principle, that students should come first. Students should have clear and fair rules, strong protections for lawful expression, and better information about the costs of their education. I will keep my remarks brief so that members have time to debate this bill, but I want to focus on what it would do, what it would leave to institutions, and what would be developed to regulations and implementation.

Mr. Chair, Bill 38 would allow government to establish tuition maximums for individual programs or groups of programs beginning in '27-28. A tuition maximum is a ceiling. It is not a target. It is not an automatic increase. It is not permission for unlimited increases. Institutions will continue to set domestic tuition, but they would do so within the applicable maximum. The current 2 per cent limit applies to the institution-wide average. It does not necessarily limit the increase faced by a student in a specific program or restrict it from reductions in tuition. Under the current rules tuition in an individual program can increase by as much as 10 per cent if the institution remains within its overall average and meets the existing requirements. That means a student considering one program can face a much larger increase than the institution-wide average suggests.

Bill 38 does not determine program groupings, label disciplines as low priority, or give the minister authority to close programs. Our intended transition approach would protect existing domestic students in '27-28 by limiting their increase to the lower of 2 per cent or the applicable ministerial maximum. Bill 38 does not set individual tuition amounts in the legislation. It creates the authority for a clear system with enforceable limits.

Mr. Chair, tuition is one part of affordability. We continue to cover a significant share of postsecondary education costs through public funding. Budget '26 provides $2.2 billion for postsecondary operations, which is $125 million more than in '25-26. We have also removed parental income from provincial student aid assessments. For eligible students that change is expected to provide access to an additional $118 million in provincial loans within the existing disbursement budget.

In terms of institutional neutrality, academic freedom, and autonomy, John Stuart Mill wrote, "He who knows only his own side of the case, knows little of that." Frederick Douglass, who knew what it cost to speak when a room did not want to hear him, said, "To suppress free speech is a double wrong. It violates the rights of the hearer as well as those of the speaker." And my personal hero, Thomas Sowell, warned against stifling disagreement "instead of debating those differences in a marketplace of ideas." When an unpopular argument is silenced on campus, the speaker loses their voice and every student loses the chance to weigh it, challenge it, or be changed by it. Some will say that open debate can be uncomfortable, and they are right. But the answer to a hard argument is a better argument, not a closed door.

That is why Bill 38 also asks institutions to stay neutral. When a university officially takes a side on a contested question, every student and professor who disagrees must ask what speaking up will cost them. The Kalven Report put it simply. "The university is the home and sponsor of critics; it is not itself the critic." Individuals remain free to speak, to criticize, to dissent. Neutrality is restraint by the institution so that individuals, students, faculty, staff, and invited guests are free.

There were some, like the socialist postmodern critic and theorist Marcuse, who argued that tolerance should be withheld for some views. He named the direction plainly, "intolerance against movements from the Right and toleration of movements from the Left." But the classic liberal John Stuart Mill held the opposite, that even a single dissenter should not be silenced by everyone else, however certain they feel, and those who would limit a question Marcuse himself raised: who decides which views deserve a hearing?

Bill 38 starts from a different principle. No institution should be the judge of which ideas are fit to be heard. Mr. Chair, institutional neutrality applies to the official voice of an institution. It does not impose neutrality on individual students, faculty, or staff. It does not tell a professor what to teach. It does not tell a researcher which conclusion to reach. It does not authorize government to approve speakers, monitor classrooms, or veto campus events. It does not prevent an institution from precriticizing government on matters connected to its academic mission or operations, including teaching, research, funding, and legislation.

In reference to student codes of conduct and ministerial review, Mr. Chair, the issue is not whether institutions have student codes. The issue is whether every student can count on clear rules and a fair process, regardless of the institution they attend. In 2025 Advanced Education examined nearly 200 student code policies and procedures submitted by postsecondary institutions. That review found significant variation. Institutions would continue to write and administer their own codes to their existing governance structures. They would continue to decide individual cases.

Bill 38 would not create a provincial student discipline office. It would not make a minister an appeal body for a particular allegation. The framework would create a common provincial floor administered by institutions. A common floor is not a takeover. A requirement for fairness is not censorship. Annual reporting is not political control. Mr. Chair, Bill 38 is enabling legislation. It establishes clear authority, defined roles, and public accountability. We will continue to engage postsecondary leaders and effective stakeholders as the regulations, ministerial orders, and implementation guidance are developed.

Mr. Chair, Bill 38 also contains practical amendments to the Professional Governance Act. Bill 38 would remove the joint

regulation provisions and bring professional technologists and professional licensees together in one professional limited licensee class regulated by APEGA. This approach was requested by the organizations involved. It would reduce duplication and provide registrants and employers with one regulator and one point of contact while maintaining professional accountability and public interest oversight.

Mr. Chair, I would like to move an amendment. This is a minor housekeeping amendment to section 2 of the bill. In two places it would replace the words "complaint review committee" with "complaints inquiry committee." It applies to the proposed section 64.1(1)(b) and to proposed section 70.1(1)(b) and (2)(b). The amendment changes the name of the committee in these provisions.

Mr. Chair, Bill 38 provides a practical and balanced framework. Above all, it puts students at the centre: their ability to plan, their right to fair treatment, their freedom to think and speak, and their opportunity to build a future in Alberta. I encourage all members to support this amendment and Bill 38.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the amendment moved will be referred to as amendment A1. Are there any comments, questions, or others wanting to speak to amendment A1?

Seeing none.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: Do we have any other speakers wishing to speak on the main bill, Bill 38? The Member for Calgary-Currie.

Member Eremenko: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. Yes. I'm happy to stand and speak to the main bill. Actually, thank you to the minister for answering a question that I had jotted down, which was around what the complaint mechanism is supposed to be in this process. You know, I think that there's probably more to come in the regulations around how the – let me get the name right – complaint inquiry committee is actually going to be governed and by what standards. I think it really does highlight the importance here around standardization and consistency.

4:30

That is one of my biggest concerns, actually, about Bill 38. How do we seek to apply concepts such as political neutrality in a way that is, in fact, consistent across all of our postsecondary institutions? It's a loaded conversation and one that I think is particularly difficult to have right now given some of the political polarization and, you know, the double and triple kind of meanings behind so much of what's happening right now. Really challenging, I think, to identify how neutrality can be consistently applied and what, in fact, does constitute neutrality.

I wanted to take the first few minutes here in discussing Bill 38 to talk about that particular portion of the bill, the piece that addresses institutional neutrality. I was on my way to the Field of Crosses ceremony last week for Remembrance Day, and I heard the interview with the minister on the radio. I think he, too, probably captured in some of his comments how very complicated and complex this undertaking, in fact, is. What we have is a tradition and practice and customs around what we expect from our public postsecondary institutions. Important to note there that Bill 38 applies to the public postsecondary institutions, not to private, in the province.

But it is awfully complicated. Understandably, the interviewer asked for some examples about: "Well, okay. You know, let's get into the nitty-gritty details here. Can universities speak about truth and reconciliation?" The minister said that on truth and reconciliation specifically, if it fulfills the university's mission when it comes to teaching or research, then, yes, they can speak to it, but if it gets into political territory, then the institution can't speak to it. Leadership on behalf of the university can't speak to it, but leadership as an individual can. Okay.

The interviewer goes on to say – it was kind of timely because, as I mentioned, I was on my way to Field of Crosses. It was just the day before Remembrance Day. He says: "How about Remembrance Day? You know, where does that kind of fall on the side of the fence of neutrality? Can the institution weigh in on Remembrance Day?" "Oh, yeah. Remembrance Day: that one is common sense. Sure." I mean, gosh. Common sense. Even my definition of – it's not an entirely objective term.

You know, it's incredibly complicated. I'm really not sure how the minister or the institution's board that is going to be responsible for putting together the list of what is neutral or not, what is political or not, what is common sense or not – how that is in fact going to be embarked upon as a project. Will the regulations have – I mean, it would be an infinite list of specific examples. We talked about two on the CBC interview, TRC and Remembrance Day. Any number of international conflicts, heritage days, heritage months: the list could go on and on and on. I think what is incredibly important here is that we're actually talking about a consistent application in the definition so that what the University of Lethbridge does is no different than Olds or Grant MacEwan. I'm not clear how that can actually be achieved.

Now, the part of Bill 38 that speaks specifically to – I had it right here. On pages 5 and 6 the bill speaks specifically to the policies that the institution has to establish, implement, and maintain with respect to institutional neutrality and freedom of expression. You know, there's a little bit of very high-level guidance here. A policy with respect to institutional neutrality must address

> (i) the duty of the board to remain neutral on political, social or ideological matters that are not related to its academic mission;
>
> (ii) the ability of the board, a member of the board and senior officials . . . to issue statements on behalf of the post-secondary institution . . .
>
> (iii) how the board will ensure students are able to learn in an environment that fosters a diversity of viewpoints and free and open inquiry.

On that first one, (2)(a)(i), I thought I would just pop on to any random university and actually look at the mission. I went on to the University of Lethbridge's website, and in their series of commitments that kind of compile the institution's mission, one of the pieces here is that "We value and work to strengthen our relationships with professional partners in the communities we serve." They also talk about striving "to thoughtfully respond to complex educational and societal challenges as they emerge." That is within their mission. Therefore, within the scope of the university being able to take what I would assume is an official position on something that might be political, might be controversial, but absolutely aligns with their mission, how does that get reconciled? How do we square those two things? You can see that it's fraught territory.

On page 6 of the bill subsection (3) also talks about the institution's new kind of legislated requirement to create a policy with respect to freedom of expression, that the policy must

> (a) address the following matters in accordance with the regulations:
>
> > (i) the duty of the board to protect the freedom of expression of students, academic staff, non-academic staff and visitors;
> >
> > (ii) any other matter specified in the regulations,
>
> (b) include any provisions or . . .

We don't need to get into the other stuff, but that piece around the duty of the board to protect the freedom of expression: there's nothing in the legislation that also addresses the duty of the board to prevent harm. That's not some woke, like, snowflake position to take on freedom of speech. Goodness knows, this is something that has been incredibly weaponized and exploited by conservative movements in Alberta, in Canada, in North America, around the world, that freedom of expression can be leveraged to basically say whatever you want, that civil liberties – but eventually those liberties bump into the potential of doing real harm to an individual. This legislation says nothing about the board's what I would argue is an equal duty to prevent harm.

If you are in fact creating an institution that is neutral, if that's possible – let's pretend that it is, in fact, possible to create a postsecondary ecosystem that is truly a blank slate on which the students, the individuals participating in that space have the freedom to engage on potentially controversial, tough subjects. If that is, in fact, a neutral space, then we have to defend the prevention of harm as much as we do the freedom of expression, and Bill 38 says nothing to the former.

Now, this piece around neutrality is an incredible concern for me, Mr. Chair, because, frankly, this UCP government, if we look at their track record, has not demonstrated a great deal of discretion when it comes to their willingness to dig very deep into public institutions to apply their definition of neutrality. There is ideology in politics. I think we can point to just about any piece of legislation that we've talked about in this session that has been highly informed by ideological and political position: public education, our public health care system, two systems that belong to all Albertans, regardless of political stripe; municipal governments and the Municipal Government Act; employment practices; professional associations; the ways and the criteria by which we hire people; the ways and the criteria in which we monitor and oversee professional ethics and codes of conduct. The UCP have reached very, very deep into those institutions that should in fact be neutral but, because of their involvement, are no longer. Now they've done the same thing with postsecondary institutions.

4:40

It reminds me of Bill 13 that we debated – I don't know – earlier in 2026 or maybe late 2025, the Regulated Professions Neutrality Act, that basically kind of relieved professions who are regulated in some way from a certain kind of ethical standard. I remember standing here and raising my concerns about Bill 13 in regard to, like: when is a judge no longer a judge? Are the comments made around kind of the Thanksgiving dinner table less impactful than what he might make when he's actually wearing his robes? I don't think any of us fully take off our politician hat. We're an MLA 24 hours a day, seven days a week. What we say matters. But the professional regulations act sought to try to make some kind of distinction to say that you should be allowed to say whatever you want, no matter what you do, no matter what kind of a leader you are in the community.

I'll refer back to the interview that the minister had on that same morning with *CBC Eyeopener*, where, you know, he said, back on the truth and reconciliation piece: well, that president of the university can speak to a thing as an individual, but they can't speak to it in their capacity as the leader of the organization. I don't know if professionals ever fully take either of those hats off. We walk in both worlds when we get to a certain point in our society or in a certain point of leadership. How do we know? How do we know when the president of the university is speaking as an individual or when they're speaking on behalf of the school? That feels like that can be kind of fast and loose in terms of: oh, I wasn't speaking on behalf of the institution; I was speaking as an individual. Well, I'd argue that I don't know if you can necessarily be exclusively one or the other.

I certainly have some significant concerns. You know, gosh, there's a whole lot to come out in the regulations, as always, but I don't know if any regulation could actually suffice in terms of providing the kind of detail that I'm sure institutions are going to be needing in order to do this fairly. It is a very significant mandate that we've placed on them.

I'd like to move on to some of the changes around tuition. Alberta postsecondary students have some of the highest school debt levels in the country. I myself, Mr. Chair, once upon a time, had that student bank loan hanging over my head. I can really speak to how grateful I was that I was still able to get through university. You know, whatever that debt, whatever that loan was going to be, I was going to take it because it was going to be my way through postsecondary. But I can really speak to my own personal experiences of what it meant for my pathway after that. What it meant was that I had a series of survival jobs that prevented me from really sinking my teeth into a career related to my university degree because I just had to pay the minimum cost every month. I couldn't afford to not work.

When you're in that kind of a dire predicament, you take what you can because you don't have a choice. You just work whatever job. I worked all summer long. I worked all school year because that's how I was going to get through. Sure, you know, sometimes hardship builds character and all the rest, but that doesn't mean that we don't have as legislators a public responsibility to invest in the next generation of our workforce, of the leaders of our province, the next people who are going to be sitting in this room. Maybe they don't have to have it quite as tough. Gosh, my experience was nothing compared to an awful lot of others who I know. I'm going to age myself a little bit. That was over 20 years ago, and tuition has doubled in that time. It has doubled.

And now we're removing some certainty for institutions and for students who could count until the end of the '27-28 academic year. That will be the last year that they can count that there won't be increases of more than 2 per cent to their tuition. That makes for some really scary days ahead, I think, for students who are just trying to invest in themselves, to invest in their families so that they can have a good-paying job in the future. Having a family and a home and a fulfilling career, maybe a couple of careers over the course of their kind of job life: this is putting a lot of that into question when we can't provide them with the assurances that tuition is not going to go absolutely through the roof.

The minister has spoken and Bill 38 speaks to potential increases to tuition on programs or groups of program, I think. One thing I'd really love to see in the regulations and in forthcoming information is: by what criteria? How are we picking the program? How are we picking the group of program? Is it based exclusively on demand? Is it labour market conditions? How long will the tuition apply? How long will that increase kind of exist for students? Will there be increases throughout the course of their four- or five-year tenure in the school or in that particular program? That is the kind of certainty that I'm sure students are looking for. I'm not clear on what level of consultation was embarked upon to actually draft Bill 38, but I would certainly hope that there would be a great deal of conversation with the people who know the system best when it comes to the drafting of the regulations.

As I said, you know, sometimes those tuition increases can lead to some very significant and kind of nerve-racking delays to really get your feet under you as a new person out in the labour force. Goodness knows that it is only one more thing on top of an awful lot of pressures that students are currently feeling. Cost of living increases, rent and accommodation demands that are absolutely

through the roof: the affordability pressures are immense. They are absolutely immense, and I really do think that students are owed a bit more from this government in terms of helping them cover the bare minimums to simply get to school on time with, hopefully, a full belly and ready to learn.

Now, I can't help but think about this conversation around postsecondary education and be reminded of the recent legislation introduction of changes to high school graduation requirements, that we have a bill before us that is going to reduce the minimum high school graduation requirements. It really begs the question of what it means for competition and whether or not Alberta high school graduates are going to be competitive when it comes to admission rates in university. When we're looking at other schools, other high school systems around the country who do in fact require more than one grade-12 level course, who do in fact require more than one diploma exam to be written, who have at minimum social studies, English, science, math – we are now putting high school students out into the world to compete with students from other jurisdictions who will have, frankly, a higher level of qualification.

To what extent has the minister discussed with education or maybe jobs, economy, and trade and talked about the longer term consequences of lowering the bar for Alberta kids when it comes to graduating and how well prepared and how equipped they are to be successful in the university system? We're making it potentially more expensive. We're focusing it exclusively on labour, but increasingly I think what we're seeing . . . [A timer sounded]

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any others wishing to provide comments, questions, or amendments?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 38 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Any opposed? That is carried.

4:50

Mr. Schow: Mr. Chair, I move that the committee rise and report Bill 38.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 38. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading
Bill 37
Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2026

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is that time again where we introduce the best bill. I rise to move second reading of the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2026.

This act, Mr. Speaker, to no one's surprise, has lots of miscellaneous statutes that we are amending, and they are as follows: Private Vocational Training Amendment Act, Agricultural Operation Practices Act, Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act, Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities Act, Seniors Benefit Act, Water Act – kind of important these days, am I right? – Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020 (No. 2), Loi linguistique, or the French act – how'd I do on that, Minister Glubish? – Land Titles Act, Vital Statistics Act, Fairness and Safety in Sport Act, also very important, Alberta Stock Exchange Restructuring Act, Local Authorities Capital Financing Act, Public Sector Wage Arbitration Deferral Act, and Teachers' Pensions Plan Act. As is custom, the opposition has been consulted on these amendments, so I hope that these consequential amendments will find quick passage in this House as is customary.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of Bill 37, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2026.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to provide comment?

The Government House Leader to close debate.

Mr. Schow: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would like to close debate. That's it.

[Motion carried; Bill 37 read a second time]

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

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

Mr. Wright: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 39, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2026 (No. 2). This bill brings together a series of amendments from multiple ministries that respond to different needs across our health care system. It includes protections for vulnerable Albertans and clear rules and oversight, preserving stability and ensuring our legislation remains accurate. Bill 39 does four key things: strengthens protections in publicly funded care settings, clarifies laboratory and self-insured requirements, supports stable labour relations, and updates regulation so it remains accurate and consistent. Together these changes share a common goal: to keep Alberta's health care system clear, accountable, responsive to the people it serves.

Mr. Speaker, behind every policy and every piece of legislation and, frankly, every decision that's made in this Chamber, there are real people who deserve to feel confident that the quality of care will be there when they need it most. When Albertans trust the care of someone they love to others, they are placing their faith in a system that's meant to protect and support them. They expect their loved ones to be treated with compassion and respect. They expect their voices to be heard, their concerns to be taken seriously, and, when something falls short, they expect accountability and meaningful

action. That trust matters, and that's why at the heart of this bill it's about protecting vulnerable Albertans.

The Protections for Persons in Care Act has not seen a substantial update since 2009, while the way we care and support those in care has evolved since then. Imagine a family who raises concerns about the care of their mother and father. They should not have to wonder whether those concerns will be investigated or whether an identified problem is actually going to be corrected.

The proposed amendments would authorize compliance officers to enter service providers' premises to assess compliance with an order or court order or, with the required consent before entering, a private dwelling. It would improve the fairness of the appeals process and strengthen compliance and enforcement to prevent further abuse of clients. It would replace the current list of care settings with service providers prescribed in regulation to reflect how publicly funded care is delivered today rather than how the system operated 17 years ago, because when we identify a problem, the one thing is making sure that it gets fixed the first time.

I want to be clear. Appeal rights remain and are strengthened. The amendments would not reduce existing protections or create routine inspections. Rather, they would ensure vulnerable Albertans continue to receive the protections, dignity, and accountability they deserve.

Bill 39 also introduces important amendments to strengthen protections for another group of vulnerable Albertans. Under the leadership of the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction our government has developed compassionate intervention, a made-in-Alberta approach to helping those living with the most severe forms of addiction and making sure that they get access to the care they need. For families who have watched someone they love struggle with addiction, searched desperately for help, and exhausted every option, the fear of what might happen next is all too real. We recognize the seriousness of these circumstances and the responsibilities that come from getting it right.

Albertans expect us to have proper safeguards in place from the very beginning. That's why these amendments are focused on ensuring that appropriate procedures, regulations, and protections are redefined before compassionate intervention is implemented as a measure of last resort in spring 2027. The proposed amendments to the Compassionate Intervention Act will clarify and strengthen roles, authorities, and accountabilities; ensure the prioritization, triage, and deferral of applications; expand the medical director's authority to direct transfers between facilities for operational, clinical, or safety reasons; create provisions for therapeutic passes to better support clients and treatment teams; and it would allow the minister to designate inspectors to support compliance. These changes will help ensure the framework is administered effectively and consistently while maintaining the safeguards and protections established under the act.

Bill 39 also addresses a long-standing gap in how laboratory testing is funded for uninsured patient-paid health services. For approximately 15 years when patients accessed services that were patient-paid clinics, Alberta Precision Laboratories services covered the costs of any associated tests through its public-funded budget. This meant taxpayers were covering laboratory costs associated with care that was not publicly insured. This is precisely the kind of issue our health system refocus has helped bring to light. By strengthening oversight and accountability, we have been able to identify a long-standing gap and take an action to address it. Closing this gap is expected to save Albertans $12 million annually while ensuring public funds are only going to publicly insured services.

5:00

Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker. Albertans who require laboratory tests as part of medically necessary insured care will continue to receive those services at no cost. This is not changing. Full stop. These amendments apply only to laboratory tests associated with uninsured services. Our government's public health guarantee remains firmly in place and medically necessary insured health services will continue to be publicly funded. Providing Albertans with greater choice in health care must never come at the expense of protecting the publicly funded system they rely on.

Mr. Speaker, these amendments protect our most vulnerable, help get compassionate intervention right the first time, and make sure public dollars support our public health care system. This legislation is not simply about processes and paperwork. It's about the people who those processes are meant to serve. I encourage all members of this Assembly to support this bill.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2026 (No. 2).

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to speak? I will recognize the Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to rise to speak to Bill 39. I very strongly oppose this bill. This is one more step out of many bills that this government is bringing in to move us towards a two-tier, private health care system. There are many things in this bill, including that they are moving a lot of authority to make future changes in health policy into the hands of cabinet so that they're not even going to be discussed in the Legislature.

I want to thank the many groups that are continuing to bring evidence forward and to fight for public health care as opposed to this two-tier, American system, including Friends of Medicare, the Canadian Health Coalition, and Canadian Doctors for Medicare. Please go to their websites. There's lots of evidence-based information available there that tells the story of why we need to stick with publicly funded health care and indeed improve it. We need to make a lot of improvements, but going this route of this government towards a private system is going in absolutely the wrong direction.

I want to reassure Albertans that Alberta's NDP caucus is standing up for you, for protecting your publicly funded health care system. Just like we stood up for you as Albertans to remain part of Canada, we will stand up for you to be part of our public health care system.

Bill 39 is going the wrong direction. We don't need to tell Albertans that over the last seven and a half years this UCP government has broken health care. Albertans see it and experience it every day when they try to go to a doctor, when they call an ambulance, when they go to an emergency room, or when they're waiting for surgery or a test or waiting to see a specialist. The changes that this government has made over the last seven and a half years up to and now getting worse with Bill 39 have created more chaos and more privatization.

[The Speaker in the chair]

They have built and are continuing to double down on an American-style, two-tier health care system where people who have money will be able to pay for faster access to service but everyone else is going to wait even longer because we do not have the workforce to support the private tier that they are building. At the same time Albertans are waiting longer. The wait-lists have exploded.

We have a plan. It isn't simply a matter of saying that we don't want this. We have been working over the last two and a half years, consulting widely with Albertans, consulting widely with experts, with health care professionals, including leaders in our health care

system who are ignored and pushed aside by this government in favour of consultants who try to find some evidence for some question that the UCP brings to them.

We have been identifying what the big issues are, and this could be done by many people. We know what the big issues are that Albertans want. Bill 39 is going to move against this again and again. Albertans want access to a family doctor. Yes, they've brought in more physicians, but it's well known that the way we need to build primary care is by building team care, and that means funding the entire team, not just the physicians.

We know that Albertans want access to emergency services when they need it. They don't want to wait, sometimes until they die in their home, for an ambulance to come. We have a plan. We know what needs to be done. We also know that Albertans are tired of waiting in emergency departments. They're not even going there; they're leaving before being seen. We're burning out the staff in our emergency departments, and that's because we can't get people out of emergency departments and we don't have the preventive services and primary care and other needs met so that people don't have to go there in the first place. This government has not invested in the things that need to happen that anyone in health care would know need to happen, probably also their consultants, although that's not what they're doing, so that we can move ahead. This bill does not solve any of these problems.

No Albertan should need to wait hours. We will free up hospital beds by ensuring that patients can move more quickly to home, to home care, to assisted living, or to continuing care as appropriate. We know that the most appropriate people to move are those that are ready, not necessarily someone who's been there two years and has very complex needs and is going to get moved to the wrong place at this point in time. We will expand hospital capacity, and we would have had a new hospital opening in south Edmonton had this government not cancelled it. This bill does nothing to get more hospital capacity.

We will expand access to care outside of hospitals. There are pilot programs running now that provide hospital-at-home care, but they're not scaled up. They're not being provided to their maximum. We will invest in public health, in prevention, in early intervention, in better management of chronic disease, and mental health and addiction supports, and we will ensure that there's reliable emergency room coverage and readiness for periods of high demand. Our hospitals under this government were full in the middle of the summer. We are not going to be able to manage this flu season. It's already peaking, and we're having difficulties. This bill provides nothing that meets the needs of what Albertans need at this point.

We will guarantee access to an ambulance when and where Albertans need it. They no longer have confidence that help will be on the way when they call 911. Many years now of UCP mismanagement have left ambulances delayed at hospitals instead of responding to emergencies, have left ambulances understaffed because they are paying no attention to retention of workers, of paramedics. They're burned out. There aren't enough. They're not staying in the profession. We will focus on retention and training of the paramedic workforce so that we can meet the demands of Alberta. This bill does nothing to address that.

We will improve ambulance response times by growing the paramedic workforce through training, recruitment, health and safety supports, and retention. We will reduce delays that keep the ambulances off the road. This bill has nothing to offer in terms of those major needs of Albertans. Instead, they're moving to more privatization, which is only going to make wait times longer for the majority of the population.

5:10

We will ensure that every Albertan can access the care they need by cutting surgical, diagnostic, and specialist wait times by 30 per cent within three years of being in government. Too many Albertans live with pain, uncertainty, and have unnecessary delays as they wait longer than is medically recommended for surgeries, for diagnostic tests, and for specialist appointments. This bill is doing nothing to ensure that. These waits that people are experiencing now are the direct result of the UCP breaking our health care system. They're leaving us with hospital worker shortages. People are leaving their profession in droves.

They have provided limited and underfunded infrastructure. A respiratory therapist in our major hospitals has to choose between which patient will get the device needed to keep them comfortable. We haven't invested in the infrastructure we need. That creates burnout and great moral distress in our workers. We need our workers to be healthy for their own sake but also to be able to provide the best care.

We will do that, and we will do that by working with workers who know what those issues are. There has been very poor co-ordination across the system and a completely disconnected referral system. We will work with the people in the system, both primary care and specialists, to fix that system and have centralized waiting lists for regions and with groups that are ready so that people will know where they are on a wait-list and will be able to have the choices that are appropriate for them. This bill doesn't mention that. It is not touching anything on that.

We will expand the workforce as needed to provide the care people need. This will give us the capacity to deliver care. It doesn't have to be just a doctor or perhaps a nurse. There are many others that can provide the care that is better suited to the patient's need.

We will increase the utilization of operating rooms in our public systems. There are five ORs that have never opened in Foothills hospital. There are about as many in the South Health Campus in Calgary. There are underutilized operating rooms across the system because this government has been privatizing, which they're doing more and more of with this bill, and moving the staff and the resources out of our public system into the private system.

Now, when you fund surgeries at a private centre, you're paying for the infrastructure as well as for the staff and the resources. We have that infrastructure. They're wasting that by paying it to prop up the development of these private businesses and corporations. Now, the reality is that we need all of what's happening there, but we also need the expansion in our public system. This bill does nothing to address that.

Our diagnostic services are limited by staff and by old infrastructure that is awaiting upgrades. There is almost a half a billion dollars of upgrades needed to diagnostic imaging infrastructure. We will need to deal with that. They're leaving it all there, and we're going to have longer wait times if we don't fix it.

We hear about using AI to do more scans, which is a great thing and that needs to happen, but the software doesn't even work on the majority of the scanners we have because they're at end of service and out of date. We can't even implement these new solutions on old equipment.

We also know that diagnostic imaging is at its limit because we have no more staff. Bringing in another tier like Bill 39 is going to help bring in more private care. The same staff that we now have working flat-out are now going to be moving into the private system. It's easier. They're not going to get burned out. They don't have the case of the person that has delirium that's fighting them and causing challenges and delaying their ability to get on with the next patient because someone's very ill. We know that you take burned-out staff and you don't treat them well and you don't focus

on retention, they're going to move into that private system. So our wait times are going to just grow in the public system.

Seven years of this mismanagement and bringing health care into different pillars has been very harmful to the system. There is no question that the pillars identify areas of great importance. Primary care is very important, mental health and addictions are very important, acute care is very important; but they should not be separated from each other because patients need all of these. We need to bring them together, and we know that we need to have an accountable minister, a single ministry. We know it's a fragile system. They've broken it; it's fragile. We have to do things gently to bring things together so that workers don't have to go through another huge upset. We're not going back to the way it was. We know that we already needed improvements. We will make those improvements.

We also know that we need to totally rebuild public health. Public health provides safety to the population. It's been broken up. Some of the people that test or deliver are not even in the same ministry or under the leadership of the people that lead it. We need to make things so that health care workers don't have multiple different employers. If you work in one of the current health ministries and you are a nurse or a physio and you want to do some work in another, you could actually have two full-time jobs before you actually get any overtime for that extra work. There's no incentive for anyone to take extra shifts when it's just going to be a totally separate job. We also know that for rehabilitation staff, which we are very desperately short of, that there are great advantages economically for them to go live in B.C. and work in B.C.

We've had an advantage in Alberta in that we had such a varied, cohesive system that they had great career opportunities, that they had opportunities to have input in developing systems, in working for a period of time in one area and then working in another area. Now with the different pillars, that's shot, and our acute-care systems are worse off for finding rehabilitation staff and we're losing our ability to recruit and retain our staff.

We know that we need to rebuild trust, and this bill is just one more step away from trust of government. This Bill 39 is building more on privatization. We will focus on rebuilding trust of the public and of health care workers. We will have protections for health care workers. We will uphold and protect the Canada Health Act. We will launch a judicial-led public inquiry into the corrupt care scandal. We will introduce whistleblower protections for health care workers. We will report publicly on wait times, access to care, and on health system performance.

This government just keeps making promises and saying they're planning, but they don't actually get there, and when they implement something, they're doing it poorly because they're not even asking the people who know the system how to make things happen. We will put patients and health care workers and communities at the centre of this planning and work very directly with front-line health care workers and communities to improve delivery and patient care.

Now, one of the things that's of great importance to our system is to have a very strong focus on the workforce, and we will strengthen the health care workforce. Where is there anything in Bill 39 that talks about strengthening the health care workforce?

5:20

We will have better access to primary care with shorter wait times, stronger emergency services, and expanded home care and continuing care by working with workers, because all of those things depend on workers. Unfortunately, after the many years of UCP disruption and uncertainty, health care professionals have been asked to do more with less, and their voices have been totally silenced and their solutions disregarded. We're listening to them. I've been speaking to them, as have many of my colleagues, for well over two years, and our consultations will continue so that we are ready on day one to be implementing and moving forward with all these fixes. Where in this bill is there something that's going to actually help people?

Health care workers are the foundation of every commitment that we make in our future plans for the future of health care. I want to stress that this bill does nothing for Albertans.

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

Member Batten: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to join debate on Bill 39, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2026 (No. 2), and I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Varsity for bringing up such amazing points.

I would say that part of responsible management of a system as large and as complex as our health care system means that we need to rely on experts. It means that we need to talk to the people who are actually doing the work, and that we need to make decisions appropriately with that consultation, and so I really appreciate what the Member for Calgary-Varsity just shared because it really speaks to, well, the Alberta NDP's plans for when we're government and when we have the opportunity to, well, fix our public health care system.

Now, Bill 39: it enables Bill 11, basically. If you remember what Bill 11 was, that is when they introduced dual practice, so allowing physicians to practice in both the public and in the private system with very few, if any, guardrails. The reality is, Mr. Speaker, that Albertans want access to high-quality health care. They deserve to have access when and where they need it, and they deserve high-quality care. That's just a fact.

Now, we've heard and we've seen and we've debated some amazing legislation. Even earlier this week on Monday we had private member's Bill 214 brought in from the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, and that entire private member's bill was about protecting our public health care system. When we, you know, look at Bill 39, well, it's kind of clear as to why the government was so opposed to it, because that private member's bill brought out so many validators, Mr. Speaker, that in the presser they actually had to zoom out because there were so many health professionals that were in support of that bill. If we kind of expand on that a little bit and say, "Gee. A whole bunch of health experts and health professionals and the people on the front lines came out to support this private member's bill earlier this week that was all about protecting public health care," and then we shuffle forward a few days, and this government brings out another bill that's all about privatizing public health care. Yeah. This is, again, another bill that is not focused on the priorities of Albertans, and it's actually really harmful.

I want to speak a little bit to the pride Canadians have in our universal health care system. It wasn't that long ago that this government spent millions upon millions of dollars asking Albertans whether or not they were Canadian. We are overwhelmingly, delightfully Canadian, and I guess one of the most prideful things that we have is our universal health care system, right? This bill kind of sounds anti-Canadian. I'm just going to say it. It is against what Albertans are asking for, and it's against, you know, some of our true values of being Canadian: our universal health care system.

Now, our national health care system: it's a national investment, it's a national agreement, and going against agreements or modifying them in your favour makes you kind of not a good partner. Just going to put that out there. Bill 39 is continuing to walk Alberta – well, run, slam, whatever – into American-style health care.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I have shared in this House before that I spent almost a decade living in the United States. During that time I certainly accessed their health care system. I want to share something that I witnessed when I was in Memphis, Tennessee, in 2004. Hmm, a little while ago. Now, back then the only thing that was around for folks who didn't have private insurance was the emergency care rights, which was completely federal. Basically, this was supposed to give access to emergency services for folks who weren't insured. Unfortunately, how that kind of rolled out is that for hospitals that were more private, they didn't see the people outside. They didn't provide that actual access. You can imagine that in an emergency, that delay first of all could cost lives. Further, in order for that person to then – what? – lodge a complaint: it was set up for people to fail, and that's what we're seeing in this. We should take lessons from those who've tried these things before. We should be smarter than simply repeating errors that we are seeing elsewhere.

My time in Memphis, 2004, I had very good insurance. I was incredibly fortunate because I worked for St. Jude children's hospital, which is phenomenal, and we had good insurance. This is my first time having to work with insurance for health because I had lived in Canada for my whole life prior to that. Now, what that meant was that when I would go to a physician, I would pay a copay.I believe that back then it was $10. So for $10 I would have access to, well, the physician, the labs, physio, whatever it was that I needed for $10. In 2004 – and I meant to find this; oh, my goodness, and if I can, I will absolutely table it – I was invoiced. That is their practice in Tennessee, or at least it was in 2004, where even though you have private insurance, they would invoice you to show you. Like, they're not asking for payment; they're simply showing what they charge your insurance.

Now, I'm curious what everyone's guesses would be for the cost of a standard visit to see a doctor in 2004. Yes, there was some basic blood work done. There was nothing going on; it was just prevention. Any guesses what that cost? Anyone? Anyone?

An Hon. Member: Five thousand.

Member Batten: Well, in 2004, it was $700, which at the time – like, let's think about it, that was many moons ago now. That is what was billed to my insurer. Right? So if you look at it and look at inflation and everything else and fast forward, that is $1,200 U.S. for a single visit, and that's assuming that the cost of those services hasn't increased in – what? – 22 years. Of course they have. We need to avoid that happening here, Mr. Speaker. Every time we take another step closer to privatizing our health care system, that's where we're headed. I don't think Albertans want us to go there. In fact, I know Albertans don't want us to go there.

Now, for Albertans right now, because of Bill 11 and what they're trying to do with Bill 39, if you have money you might be able to access whatever services you need out of pocket. Now, I hear stories all the time. My constituents will tell me, you know, they have sought treatment in other provinces. They have the funds to do these things; however, they are not actually enabled by this government. So even the folks who are able to access the private services are not being enabled by this government. It's interesting, Mr. Speaker. As much as I have these conversations with these folks, absolutely I want everyone to have access to the care they need when and where they need it. I cannot fault someone for seeking out the care they need outside of our public system because, well, our public system has been set up to fail. This effectively means that my constituents who pay out of pocket for those services are paying twice. They pay with their taxes. Every person who works in Alberta, who works in Canada, who pays taxes: those taxes go towards our publicly funded universal health care system.

5:30

Now, in Alberta if you don't have excess money just kicking around to go receive the services you need, well, you're going to wait in line, and those wait-lists are not transparent, Mr. Speaker. Those wait-lists are potentially a letter in the mail, which actually I find amusing now that it's 2026, that tells you that you may or may not receive whatever services you're waiting for in, you know, maybe six, eight, 12 months. Albertans are then asked to trust that this government is allowing the public system to work through those incredibly long wait-lists.

Bill 39 clearly shows they aren't because, as was mentioned by the Member for Calgary-Varsity, we don't have an excess number of health care professionals. All the auxiliary staff that support our hospitals: we don't have extra. In Alberta we do have a workforce crisis. As much as we hear numbers thrown out from across, from the government there, claiming that, you know, we have so many more of this and that and the other thing, at no point do they actually speak to what that means for Albertans.

What does it mean when you've, say, hired a thousand new nurses? What does that mean for an Albertan? Where do those nurses go? Albertans aren't seeing that. They're waiting in pain. They're waiting and being asked to trust the government, who is actively trying to privatize our public health care system. Mr. Speaker, like, this is a huge ask of Albertans, and I think Albertans have been very, very loud in saying that they do not want what Bill 39 is bringing forward. They don't.

In fact, this government had a golden opportunity a couple of weeks back when, actually, I brought forward my private member's bill, which was the Patient Outcomes Reporting Act. That bill was to enable transparency, accountability, and incorporate the patient experience into our outcomes so that we could make better decisions. Government claimed: "Oh, yeah. Albertans have enough transparency and accountability in health care. They don't need anything." Never mind that there are multiple investigations going on about corruption; you know, trust us. Pardon me. Trust the government, apparently.

Just like private member's Bill 211 from me or Bill 214 from the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, both pieces of really smart legislation that involve consultation that went through multiple rounds of trying to get the best legislation we could for Albertans. This government decided that they didn't want that and continue to move forward privatizing.

Now, we know on this side of the House that one of our greatest gifts as Canadians is our universal health care system. We know that it is important that it's accessible and that it's portable – right? – meaning that if an Albertan travels into a different province, they will receive the care they need and there's an agreement between the provinces. What happens, Mr. Speaker, when Alberta decides that – you know what? – no, you need to have additional funds or special whatever in order to access public care here? What happens to folks visiting from other provinces? What happens to the agreement, the portability agreements between the provinces when Alberta is no longer funding, well, the necessary medical interventions?

We all know that Albertans deserve access to care, and they deserve access to that follow-up care afterwards. We know on this side of the House that health care should be based on need and not on what you can afford.

Bill 39 goes further, though, Mr. Speaker, because Bill 39 shifts future decision-making away from this Assembly, away from the public being able to see or debate and instead puts it into the ministry. Then the ministry can make really, really big decisions, really important decisions without ever consulting anyone. Kind of

like they do now but without the stuff they do in here. Now it's going to be legislation where once again the UCP government, instead of doing their job, which is governing for Albertans in the best interests of Albertans, is centralizing power. They're just going to take those decisions which – I'm sorry. For a government that fails to actually do consultations or follow evidence or consult experts, Albertans should just trust that the ministry, that the minister, is going to make the right decisions?

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

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with great interest to speak to Bill 39, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2026 (No. 2), quite a substantial piece of legislation, more than 140 pages long, continuing this trajectory of this UCP government to privatize health care and to dismantle and undermine our public health system here in the province of Alberta.

I can really think of no more improper way to use the authority and the power of this Legislature than to undermine and compromise the integrity of our health system here in Alberta. We depend on it for ourselves, for our families, for security, for economic stability, for all of the things that this Chamber represents. There's nothing more fundamental than to ensure that we have health care when we need it for ourselves and for our families and to know that it is there as a security for catastrophic events, for chronic issues, for the normal and different elements of our lives, from having children to their childhood illnesses to caring for our parents and grandparents and all of those steps along the way in a human journey.

Perhaps one of the things that we can be most proud of coming from this very same Legislature is that we enshrined those health services that we all depend on to a public health care system so that it's there regardless of your ability to pay, regardless of where you live, and regardless of other infirmities or things and circumstances that have happened to you. That's what a universal health care system is.

I'm very realistic. I know that both here in Alberta, across the country, and indeed around the world public health insurance that I'm describing is being jeopardized and is being compromised, not just in Alberta but everywhere else. But in Alberta we are deliberately accelerating the degeneration of our public system by passing bills like this, by allowing more private health care to shift that resource over from the ability for everyone to access it to otherwise someone who can only be able to pay for that service.

This is a massive power grab, Mr. Speaker – a massive power grab – on behalf of this government to privatize health care, to make the decisions out of cabinet, to move actual decisions around health care right out of this Legislature. This will be the last time we can talk about it after this because this thing, literally Bill 39, takes the authority of the Legislature to make changes to improve our health care system and moves it over to the cabinet and to executive and administrative decision. Shame on this UCP government for having the audacity to think that they can get away with this, and indeed they won't. They will not get away with this because we will win this next election and we'll make sure that bills like this don't see the light of day.

5:40

Albertans know what they have, the asset they have, with our public health system. Yes, it needs some reconstruction and needs some work, but that's what we can do starting now. Both our members for Calgary-Varsity and Calgary-Acadia have been consulting with health care professionals, right? A doctor and a nurse respectively, right here on this side of the aisle, talking to ways by which we can build a constructive, co-operative health care system that's economical, that is a good investment for our dollars, it's good for our economy, but most of all it's good for the health of all Albertans regardless of where they live, regardless of their ability to pay. It's not an easy task by any means.

We've seen the compromises to our health system already in regard to private surgical centres, in regard to the ability for people to practise in both private and public systems, but it's not insurmountable by any means. We're not here to dismantle what we have; we're here to make it better, to make it better for everyone. You know, all of the nonsense that we've heard around health care over these last number of years from this UCP government: we need to move past that. Arguing this for that, tit for tat. We need to make our public system strong and to make sure that it's there when we need it for ourselves and our families.

The changes that this UCP government is making to our health care system in Alberta have no parallel in this country. This government loves to stretch the truth as to: oh, well, they do things like this in Quebec. No, they don't. Absolutely not. If you choose as a physician or a health care professional to practise in the private system, then you, sure as heck, are not going back into the public system as well. They have a law around that, and we need a law around those things, too.

I'm hopeful. I'm a hopeful person, but I also know just how much on the edge of a precipice we are standing right now in regard to health care. You know, I simply will not stand for it. We fought too hard and too long and put so much money and investment into building a public system that we can be proud of, and we're, sure as heck, not going to let it slip through our fingers.

Acute care, community care, teams practising together, making sure that we have geographic equity in regard to access to health care. Many of these members live in places where it's been a precipitous loss of health care in any given region because the hospitals are closed, because health care professionals have left. They cannot handle the pressures that they've been under, and I don't blame them, quite frankly. We need to make sure that our workforce is strong, that it is supported so that they're not constantly being burned out and called for overtime every single day, all the time.

I've got a lot of health care professionals in my family, Mr. Speaker, and I know. I look and see their phones buzzing all of the time, right? Once they got you in the hospital, it's very hard to get out when you're a health care professional because they'll say, "Well, you have to stay because we're short of workers," every single day in these big urban hospitals. I can only imagine what it's like in rural areas, right? It's becoming more difficult to live in parts of this province literally because there's no health care. You can't do that. You can't shake the dice and say: well, I'll be healthy enough. Maybe you won't be, and that hospital in the town that's adjacent to you: maybe the door is not open anymore. Maybe the doctor is gone. Maybe there are only two doctors, one doctor, no doctor, and you don't have health care.

There are many things to be done. I love debating on these issues around health care because I think it's the most important investment that we can make. We have to start by categorically not looking at it as an expense and as a drain on our budget and all of these kinds of things. It's an investment in the people of Alberta for their health, for their security, for the sake of the economy, all of these things.

We only have to look as far as the United States of America, a few hundred kilometres down the road, to see how much more a private system costs. It's at least 11 times more. We spend a dollar on any given health care procedure; it costs 11 times more south of the border. Why? Not because the health care professionals are making more. Some of them do, of course. It's because of the insurance, Mr. Speaker. It's all about health care insurance. You know very well, we

all know that these bills are being propped up by very powerful lobbyists in one of the very most powerful parts of the American economy, which is private health care insurance. That's where these are coming from. It's not to make health care better for Albertans. It's to make the health system work for private health care insurers.

Once again, we have a job, a responsibility to all Albertans to make sure that they have access to health care when they need it for themselves and their families, and that's what we intend to do over here. We're building a system now for this next year so that we can be proud of what our health care system is, so that workers are looked after in the professional health care industry. We don't look for some magical technological fix that's going to make it better. Yeah, there always are new breakthroughs. You know, artificial intelligence can be a very helpful thing for medical research, for procedures, for diagnosis and everything, but it all is predicated on the foundation of a strong health care force that's not just well compensated but respected as well.

We had members of the HSAA here today advocating for a stronger health care system. They're doing it because they see it every day. They are reaching out and touching the way that our health system is working, you know, the lab work that's done, the research that's done, and so forth, the thousands of Albertans employed in these fields. We deserve to listen to them, and we deserve to respect them, and we deserve to make sure that they have the conditions to work in so that they can stay in the profession and help to look after us and our families with our health care needs.

Do I sound, you know, irritated about Bill 39? Yeah. I know it's just part of a long line of privatization bills that have been brought forward by this UCP government over the last seven years, and it has to be put to a stop. We're here to do so as the official loyal opposition of the people of this province of Alberta, and we will ensure that our health system is strong and that it's not just something we can be proud of, but it's something that we can all count on.

Thank you.

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

Ms Goehring: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak to Bill 39, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2026 (No. 2). Now, I think it's fair to say that the majority of Albertans are concerned. There are statistics that we've seen that say that 76 per cent of Albertans are concerned about the UCP expanding American-style private pay health care. Now this piece of legislation is doing that. It gives permission and creates space for the UCP to expand. They're already – I don't even know what the word is that I can say that's parliamentary. The broken system that they've created within the health care. It's creating levers that will assist with further privatizing the health care in Alberta.

Now, when I speak to people all across the province, health care is top of mind for so many. I can tell you that they are not asking to be able to pay for health care. They're not asking for anything that is in this piece of legislation. I know that I have shared my health care experience over the last year and a half, and I can tell you that it hasn't changed. But what has changed is the conversations that I'm having with the health care providers that I interact with in a consistent manner, Mr. Speaker.

5:50

I was in my doctor's office trying to schedule a follow-up MRI. She was going through her physician system to book that appointment, and the first prompt was that MRIs are not covered in Alberta. It prompted her to go look at some of the private MRI systems to book that appointment, and she said some very unparliamentary language, that I won't share, because she knows that MRIs are a covered procedure in the province when requested by a physician for a diagnostic purpose. In my case it was for monitoring of a previous diagnosis. And it took her about 15 minutes to be able to get to the page where she could book through the public system for an MRI. Now, that's frustrating, that our physicians who practise in public health care, who believe in public health care, who have patients like myself who believe in public health care are going through systems that are encouraging people to go and pay for these services.

Now, one of the things that I know the UCP is continuously saying is that it's not privatizing. Well, it is. When you're asking private companies to provide health care services, when you're creating legislation that creates a legal platform for more privatization in the future, that is exactly what it is. It is American-style health care that people in Alberta do not want.

They want access to a family doctor. They want to be able to go into an emergency room and not wait for 14 hours to see a physician. It is very concerning when not only hearing from so many Albertans, Mr. Speaker, but I have that first-hand experience of sitting in waiting rooms for my own health care and experiencing the absolute broken system that this government has created. You know, there are unbelievable numbers of stories that are out there that I know are being shared with the government, because I am included in those e-mails, and they're sharing heartbreaking stories about loved ones that are waiting at home for an ambulance, that are waiting for hours in the emergency room without seeing a physician.

Now, I know the government is talking about their triage system, their patient liaison. Well, I can tell you that I was in a hospital in the spring where a patient had died in the waiting room. There were signs in that ER waiting room indicating that there were patient liaisons available for patients that would assist with triaging; if symptoms increased or changed, they could identify themselves to this triage liaison. Well, when I asked about that and who that person would be, a woman identified herself as a triage volunteer and said, "Those signs have been put up because we had a patient die in our ER." And I said: "Okay. You know, I understand that you are identifying a system now that's in place, and I appreciate the signage." And she said: "No, no. It's just a sign. There isn't anybody that is assigned to doing that task."

That is concerning, that we continue to hear from this government about all of the things that they're doing to support the health care system in the province when the front-line experience, the patient experience is not reflected in what they are saying. It's certainly not reflected in the legislation that they're putting forward in Bill 39.

I know that if you were to actually talk to health care providers and patients and advocates and loved ones, they would tell you clearly what they want, and that's what we have been doing as the Alberta New Democrats – listening to those experts, listening to those first-hand testimonies, listening to what actually works – and that's why we created our health care plan. It's actionable, Mr. Speaker. It isn't this story that's being spun about what the government is doing. Those that are actually experiencing the broken system that they created know that it's not accurate.

The number of health care providers that have talked to me about moral injury and the impact that that is having on so many and their mental health – we're asking physicians and nurses and diagnostic professionals to work in spaces that they know are not in the best interest of Albertans. It is having a profound effect on our health care providers in the province. That is not being addressed in this legislation. It's asking and it's giving ministers more power, giving cabinet more power to make decisions within the health care system. It doesn't talk about ways that we can

actually enhance and support and take action to fix the system that was broken by this government.

Instead, it's focusing on expanding capacity to privatize health care, which is not acceptable. People should never have to take out their credit card to go see a doctor, Mr. Speaker. That is something that is Canadian. It is something that is essentially this government looking to their friends down south and ways to expand American-style private pay health care. Nobody on this side of the House supports that. We have been very clear that privatizing health care is absolutely unacceptable, should not happen in Canada, in the province of Alberta. Yet this is the legislation that they're bringing forward.

Now, we've heard from many of my colleagues who, prior to being elected, were doctors, nurses, health care providers. Myself I was a social worker that worked in human services and worked closely with health care providers, and we know what the solutions are. Yet this government is completely ignoring that. They are looking at ways that they can make the systems that are in place right now dismantled and privatizing.

I don't understand how they have four ministers of health that are all turning a blind eye and pretending like that's not what's happening. Instead of working with one ministry, actually listening to health care providers, physicians, patient advocates, four ministers, four ministries – that's DMs, ADMs, and the list goes on of people that are working on this – this is what they continue to come up with. It's clear what the UCP wants to do, Mr. Speaker, and it's clear that Albertans are not supporting it.

I would really encourage all four of those ministries to review what Albertans are asking for. Review what physicians and health care providers are saying, looking at the diagnostics. There are labs in Edmonton that when you go to book your requisition for a diagnostic imaging, it comes up and says, "We are not accepting patients who directly refer," because they know that that is not effective. Despite the UCP bringing in legislation to create that space to allow people to directly go out and get diagnostic imaging, the radiologists and those others that do the imaging . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but it's 6 o'clock, and as per the standing orders we are now adjourned until 10 tomorrow morning.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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

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