

Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, November 24, 2026

Day 72

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 31st Legislature
Second Session

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Arcand-Paul, Brooks, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
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Boitchenko, Hon. Andrew, ECA, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
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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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Gray, Hon. Christina, ECA, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP), Official Opposition House Leader
Guthrie, Hon. Peter F., ECA, Airdrie-Cochrane (PTP)
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m. **Tuesday, November 24, 2026**

Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, the committee has now resumed.

Bill 40
Electoral Divisions Act

The Chair: I believe the hon. Deputy Government House Leader has something to say.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. After that productive debate, I move that we adjourn debate on Bill 40.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

The Chair: I have two members rising. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise on Bill 35 and speak to an issue that was raised by the Minister of Education and Childcare during second reading of this bill when he spoke to the importance about having parents know a little bit more about what the standards are in report cards and have a little bit more understanding of what's happening in report cards. He also spoke about how parents seek to have a better understanding of what was taking place during professional development days.

I believe a lot of that is best managed by the school boards themselves. They are the most direct line of communication between parents and schools. Certainly, I know that as a parent I've been able to communicate directly with my school about questions that I had about my kids' report cards, and I certainly don't believe it's necessary to create standards for all school boards. I do understand, however, that the minister cares about parents being able to have this information. For that reason, Madam Chair, I would say that I think it's equally as important that all parents should have an entitlement to that information about report cards as well as have information about what happens on PD days.

The minister is apparently very concerned about complaints that are raised at the school level that might not be resolved. I believe he has created an online portal so government can watch what's happening at the school board level, school-level decisions and issues. My view, Madam Speaker, is that if the parents of the 93 per cent of Alberta students who attend public, separate, and francophone schools are entitled to that information, so too should all parents of all students in all schools.

For that reason, Madam Chair, I'd like to propose an amendment.

The Chair: Do you have the original?

Ms Pancholi: I do. My apologies.

The Chair: Can you grab me the original, please?

Ms Pancholi: I should have kept . . .

The Chair: It's hard to tell with your phone.

Ms Pancholi: Actually, I'm not sure this is the original, but we'll go with it. It looks very similar. You know, they look the same.

The Chair: We have the original.

This will be known as amendment A1. You may proceed.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair. The amendment is as follows, that I as the MLA for Edmonton-Whitemud move that Bill 35, Education and Childcare (Securing Parental Involvement) Statutes Amendment Act, 2026, be amended in section 2 (a) by striking out subsection (5); and (b) in subsection 6 by striking out clause (a) and substituting the following: (a) in subsection 1 (i) in clause (d) by striking out "32, 33.2 and 35.1, section 42, except subsection (3)" and substituting "32, 33(1)(b.01), 35.1, 41, 41.1, section 42" and (ii) in clause (e) by striking out "66 and 70" and substituting "60.1, 66 and 70."

If it wasn't self evident from the wording of that amendment, Madam Chair, as to what this amendment actually does, allow me to clarify. As I've said, I believe it is important that if we are setting standards for parents in terms of what information they get in report cards as well as what happens during professional development, all parents and all students should be subject to those requirements. This amendment simply ensures that any standards that the minister sets with respect to report cards, with respect to reporting on professional development days and reporting of school-level disputes is now also applicable to charter and independent private schools. This is pretty fundamental, and I can't see why any member across the way would have an issue with this.

Now, that being said, I do know that in previous debate the minister had mentioned that he thought that there shouldn't be the same requirements around report cards because of the different programming choices that may exist in private schools and in charter schools as opposed to public schools. I find that comment a little bit disappointing, Madam Chair, from our minister of education because if he took the time to look at the programs that are offered by Alberta's public, separate, and francophone schools, he would see that there's actually an incredible variety of programs that are provided that, in fact, many times mirror almost exactly programs that are provided in charter and private schools.

For example, I'm very proud to have my kids attend the schools of Edmonton public school board, a school division that has really thrived on providing incredible choice to their parents and to their kids. They are definitely a school board that has taken from the very beginning the interests of meeting the different, unique challenges of students as well as the unique programming that they want.

When I look at the programs offered by Edmonton public schools as an example, yes, they offer what we would call a regular program – most people are familiar with that – but they also offer a number of programs focused on teaching philosophy and academic focus. They have academic alternative and academic enrichment programs. They have Cogito, which is, like, more of a teacher-directed instruction, very fast paced. They have very traditional learning philosophies. They have sciences and STEM programs, arts, dance, and performing visual arts programs, sports programs, girls-only education. They have a number of different language programs. My kids are in fact enrolled in French immersion programs, which is a program of choice. They have several bilingual programs in multiple languages. They have programming focused on FNMI, or First Nation, Métis, and Inuit programming. They have faith-based programs, Madam Chair, in Edmonton

public, a number of Christian programs. They used to have Islamic programs as well.

All of this variety in programming is very common in public schools in Alberta. The same is true of many other school boards: Edmonton Catholic school division; both the CBE, Calgary board of education, as well as Calgary Catholic; much of Rocky View I know offers a lot of programming. So if the concern, Madam Speaker, is that for some reason standardized report cards wouldn't make sense in private or charter schools because they offer a variety of programs, I would argue that that same logic about the inability to standardize report cards and professional development would apply as well to public and separate and francophone boards.

But the minister feels compelled to standardize that information for the 93 per cent of the students who attend our public schools. I think parents who have their kids enrolled in charter and private schools should also be able to have some basic information or whatever the regulations will end up looking about standardized report cards. Why should those parents not also get that information?

As we know, charter and accredited private schools also are required to use certificated teachers, and those teachers, of course, are required to do professional development. So too do those teachers engage in professional development on a regular basis, and I would argue parents of those students in those schools should also receive information about what their teachers are doing during professional development days.

I would argue, Madam Chair, that this is a very straightforward, fundamental amendment meant to fulfill the intentions of the minister of education, who wants parents to know more about what's happening in their schools. I say: why should that not apply to every student in every school? I think all parents want to have that information, and it would make sense to do that.

I also want to point out, Madam Chair, that there is an opportunity as well here to extend that same – if we're talking about parents, you know, when they send their kids either to school or to child care, they all have the same goals, right? They all want their kids to receive not only the best education, the best opportunities, but they also want their kids to be safe and secure and to be welcomed and for it to be inclusive.

I know the other part of Bill 35, Madam Chair, is around ensuring that parents of children enrolled in a child care facility, meaning a daycare, or in a licensed day home would also be able to have more information when a critical or serious incident occurs. We know that that is part of the amendments that are being brought forward or part of the intention behind this bill. It's about creating safety plans when an incident occurs, making sure that parents get notified of that incident, and making sure that parents are aware, when they're choosing their child care provider, that that information is available to them.

7:40

Well, the current state of Bill 35 is that it's missing an entire category of parents and children, and that is parents who have chosen to send their children to unlicensed day homes. Now, there's this perception out there that in Bill 35 or in the Early Learning and Child Care Act it's impossible to somehow regulate unlicensed day homes. That, Madam Chair, I'd like to put to rest right now. That is a complete myth. The choice about whether to regulate the safety and security of children in unlicensed day homes is a policy choice. It is a choice that the government can and should make.

I would argue that children – no matter whether their day home is a licensed or an unlicensed provider, we can all agree that every child deserves to be safe and every child deserves to be in a setting where the parents know about any safety risks, about any security risks, about any critical incident that could affect the safety of their child. That is a fundamental, core right of every parent, and if we are expanding the information and the notifications to parents of children enrolled in licensed day homes or daycares, I cannot see why we would for any reason exclude unlicensed day homes. We know that untold thousands of children in Alberta are enrolled in unlicensed day homes. I believe and I'm certain every member in this House would believe that those children have every right to be safe.

Madam Chair, I would argue that through this amendment, we are also inspiring to make sure that the government does not renege on its responsibility to all Alberta children and to actually make the policy choice to also regulate and provide information to parents of children in unlicensed day homes. Again, I think there's always room to find an opportunity for overlap and support and, unlike how it might be characterized out in the world or even in this Chamber, there are universal truths that we in this Chamber all hold dear, and that is that we want our kids to have the best that they can. We want them to be the safest that they can.

This amendment is a straightforward way to make sure all parents have the same information regardless of what school system they choose to register their child in. It is a straightforward amendment to make sure that the information that's available to most parents is available to all parents. It is an invitation for all schools, whether they be private, charter, or public, to meet the same standards, particularly, Madam Chair, because they're all receiving public funding.

Therefore, I'm sincerely hopeful that the minister will follow through recognizing the wide variety of programming that is provided not just in charter and private schools, but if the minister were to pay close attention to what the school boards, the elected school boards who meet the local needs of their communities and deliver programming that their parents and their communities want across this province, deliver: astounding choice within the public, separate, and francophone system. That is the beauty of Alberta's system. You don't have to pay money to go to a private school. You should not have to enrol in a charter school where some kids are excluded. You can experience all the choice of programming, of supports, of resources in our public, separate, and francophone school boards.

If there are going to be standards set for some schools, all publicly funded schools, including private and charter schools, should be subject to the same standards. It's a straightforward amendment, and I hope that the government will support it.

The Chair: Are there others to amendment A1?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A1 as moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: Are there others who wish to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to propose another amendment, if I could.

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A2.

You may proceed.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to start by reading this amendment into the record. I move that Bill 35 – you guys are looking at me like I'm making something . . .

The Chair: I just am shocked that you're going to read it. You may. You can summarize it, too.

Mr. Schmidt: Oh, no, no. Madam Chair, I believe I have 20 minutes to speak. Is that correct?

The Chair: You can do mostly with that time what you want.

Mr. Schmidt: I am nothing if not an attention hog, so I'm going to soak that all up and read this entire amendment into the record. I move that Bill 35, the Education and Childcare (Securing Parental Involvement) Statutes Amendment Act, 2026, be amended in section 1 as follows: (a) in subsection 2(b)(iii) by adding the following after the proposed section 1(1)(g.1):

> (g.1) "police service of local jurisdiction", in respect of a critical incident, means the police service, as defined in the Police Act, that is responsible for providing policing services in the geographic area in which the critical incident occurs;

(b) in subsection (5) by adding the following after the proposed section 8.1(1):

> (1.1) Despite subsection (1), if an incident or critical incident occurs in a child care program that is offered or provided under a facility-based licence, the statutory director must require the holder of the facility-based licence to develop a safety plan or other measure specified by the statutory director under that subsection.

(c) in subsection (7) by adding the following after the proposed section 9.1(2):

> (3) Subject to subsection (4), a holder of a facility-based licence must inform the parents or guardians of each child enrolled in the licence-based facility, other than a parent or guardian referred to in subsection (2), of an incident or critical incident as soon as reasonably possible after the licence holder becomes aware of the incident or critical incident.
>
> (4) The holder of a facility-based licence may only inform a parent or guardian under subsection (3) of the type of critical incident or incident that occurred.
>
> (5) A holder of a facility-based licence must inform the police service of local jurisdiction of a critical incident referred to in section 1(1)(d.1)(i) to (iv) as soon as reasonably possible after the licence holder becomes aware of the critical incident.
>
> (6) Nothing in this section is to be interpreted as affecting any other rights given by, or the application of other requirements, duties or responsibilities imposed by any other Act or law in relation to the matters covered by this section.

(d) in subsection (13) by adding the following after the proposed section 18.71(1):

> (1.1) Despite subsection (1), if an incident or critical incident occurs in a child care program that is offered or provided under a family day home agency licence, the statutory director must require the licensed family day home agency to develop a safety plan or other measure specified by the statutory director under that subsection.

(e) in subsection (17) by adding the following after the proposed section 18.9221(2):

> (3) Subject to subsection (4), a licensed family day home agency must inform the parents or guardians of each child enrolled in the licensed family day home program, other than a parent or guardian referred to in subsection (2), of an incident or critical incident as soon as reasonably possible after the licence holder becomes aware of the incident or critical incident.
>
> (4) The holder of the family day home agency licence may only inform a parent or guardian under subsection (3) of the type of critical incident or incident that occurred.
>
> (5) A licensed day home agency must inform the police service of local jurisdiction of a critical incident referred to in section 1(1)(d.1)(i) to (iv) as soon as reasonably possible after the licensed day home agency becomes aware of the critical incident.

And finally,

> (6) Nothing in this section is to be interpreted as affecting any other rights given by, or the application of other requirements, duties or responsibilities imposed by any other Act or law in relation to the matters covered by this section.

Madam Chair, I fear that some of my colleagues may have missed some parts, so I'm going to read the amendment again. No, I won't.

7:50

Just to summarize the intent of this amendment should it be adopted, this amendment, if adopted, would require a few things of people who are subject to the legislation that we're considering this evening. One, it removes the discretion of the statutory director under the legislation to provide notification and compels the statutory director to provide notification to parents. It also broadens the notification. It expands the notification of critical incidents beyond those who are just directly affected to include all of those parents whose children are being taken care of in those child care facilities.

Then it also requires people who are subject to the act to notify the police of critical incidents, and it defines those critical incidents as when a child either dies while attending a child care program, goes missing while attending a child care program, or is the subject of physical, sexual, emotional, abuse or is injured when in a child care program.

Madam Chair, I think it's important to just remind the House of the reason behind these amendments. The parents of Willowbrae Academy, which is located in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar, tragically found out, after a great deal of effort on their part, that two children in the care of that child care facility were sexually assaulted by a man who remains at large. As far as we know, he's escaped the country and has not been held accountable for his actions. The amendments in this legislation are intended to improve upon the sections of the bill that would make child care facilities safer for children who are victims of these kinds of incidents.

I really can't stress enough the tremendous personal cost that at least two young children had to pay so that we'd be in the position of considering these amendments. I don't know any of the details of the children, but I can only assume that they were very young, and they had their childhoods stolen from them by somebody who lured them into a shed, knowingly lured them to sexually assault them outside of the view of the cameras that monitored the actions of the children and the staff at the facility.

Nothing that we can do here in this Legislature will ever heal the hurt that those children suffered, but it's our hope by proposing this amendment that children in the care of child care facilities in the province going forward won't have to suffer the terrible consequences of these kinds of events ever again. It's tragic that it's these kinds of circumstances that result in these kinds of amendments, this kind of legislation, but I'm so pleased to be able to speak on behalf of the constituents who are negatively affected by this incident and make sure that their voices were heard and that this legislation is improved so that they have confidence in the province's ability to regulate child care facilities so that they're adequately protecting children who are in these circumstances.

Now, Madam Chair, I would never presume to know what the outcomes of the votes or the proceedings of this House would be, but it's my understanding of the rumours and innuendo that circulate through this building that this particular amendment will not pass but that the pith and substance of this amendment will actually be adopted by the government. I sincerely hope that those rumours and innuendo are true because hundreds of thousands of kids in the care of child care facilities all across the province are depending on all of us to do the right thing here tonight.

With that, Madam Chair, I will say that I truly hope that, on behalf of all of the Willowbrae parents, the government sees fit to either adopt my amendment as it's proposed or at least take the substance of the amendment that I'm bringing forward tonight and adopt it in their legislation so that children are never in the position that the kids at Willowbrae Academy found themselves in last year.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there any others on amendment A2?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A2 as moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: Are there any other members? The hon. Minister of Education and Childcare.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I, too, have an amendment. I would be very happy to pause here and take your direction as to how best to proceed. If that involves no words from me at this point, then I'd be happy to take your direction.

The Chair: Yes. It does not require words for just a moment while we get the amendment.

Okay. This will be known as amendment A3. Please note that it's four pages.

The hon. minister may proceed with as many words as he likes in under 20 minutes.

Mr. Nicolaides: Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair. I won't use 20 minutes. I'll be brief here. But I do move that Bill 35, the Education and Childcare (Securing Parental Involvement) Statutes Amendment Act, 2026, be amended as follows. Do you want me to read all of . . .

The Chair: You don't have to.

Mr. Nicolaides: No? Fewer words. Okay. Fantastic. I get it.

I'll provide an overview, of course, and I'll do so slowly because the amendment is being distributed. I'll give colleagues in the Assembly the opportunity to be able to receive the amendment and have a look at it. But I'll provide a quick overview as to what the amendment is doing.

Now, I want to preface that, though, just by saying that we have heard very clearly from parents – of course, it's one of the primary drivers and motivators for this amendment – that decisions about creating and growing child care services should consider their concerns, respect the judgment of providers as well, and maintain strong standards for quality and safety. We have reflected a little bit more on some of this additional feedback that we've received, and that's the primary reason that I'm bringing forward these changes this evening.

What I'm proposing in this amendment will make sure that child care providers report critical incidents to the police where they have a reasonable suspicion or reasonable grounds, I should say, to believe that the incident that may have occurred may be criminal in nature. The Early Learning and Child Care Act and regulation currently requires child care operators to report incidents to the ministry, but stronger rules can be helpful to ensure that there is that mandatory reporting to police. I think that'll help strengthen safety. As well, parents have called for this, and I'm happy to report that we're delivering on those changes that parents have requested as needed, Madam Chair.

Furthermore, suggested amendments to section 9.1 and section 18.9221 would create a clear police reporting obligation for child care operators and licensed family day homes where they have grounds to believe an incident may have been criminal in nature. To avoid the police being contacted unnecessarily for nonserious incidents, the suggested changes would be limited to critical incidents that could be considered a criminal offence.

The third change I am putting forward would be changes to section 9.1 as well, that would create rules for licence holders, as I mentioned, to inform all parents of children in the child care program or licensed family day home of the type of critical incident that has occurred. The specified incidents where this rule would be used include the death of a child, abuse or neglect of a child, or allegations of abuse or neglect, and police involvement that relates to a child attending a program or to the operation of a child care operator. Together these changes respond to feedback from community members and families and strengthen the legislation while maintaining its overall purpose.

8:00

Madam Chair, these amendments are about making Bill 35 stronger and making sure it works as intended. Of course, I think we can all agree that parents deserve to know that their children are safe, that serious incidents will be reported to police when needed, and that they will be duly informed when critical incidents occur, should they occur. At the same time child care providers deserve clear rules so that they know what is expected of them. We have taken some time to listen more deeply to parents, families, and the child care sector, and these amendments reflect that. They strengthen safety, improve accountability, and give parents clear information about what is happening in the child's child care program.

Madam Chair, these are very practical changes that will put children and family first while continuing to support a strong child care system across Alberta, and for those reasons I encourage all members of the Assembly to vote in support of the amendments before them to Bill 35.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to thank the government for bringing forward this amendment. I certainly have a question for the minister or anybody else who's in a position to speak to this amendment to identify the substantive differences between this amendment and the amendment that was just voted down because it's my view, after reviewing this amendment, that the substance of the amendment is the exact same as the amendment that I just brought forward.

Regardless of how we got here, this is a rare example, in my view, of this House doing the right thing, so I want to extend my sincere thanks to the government for listening to parents and their demands, for making child care in this province safer, and for taking that into account. I also want to just thank the parents of Willowbrae Academy for their consistent efforts in making this happen, because if I had been a parent whose child had suffered what those children went through, I don't know if I would have had the strength and the focus that would have been required to make this government do what we're doing tonight.

So to all of the parents at Willowbrae Academy: thank you for your tireless efforts to make this happen, and I'm truly sorry about the circumstances that had to happen. I really hope that the victims and their families find healing and that they at least take some comfort in knowing that their suffering didn't go completely to waste, that it's leading to something better. Those children are probably too young to understand that, and by the time they're old

enough to understand it, this all will be a distant memory that only a few legislative nerds will look up in *Hansard*, but the practical implication of having safer child care facilities will live on. That's something truly remarkable, so thank you, parents of Willowbrae Academy, for bringing us to this point. Thank you to the members of the government for doing the right thing.

This is how, I think, people who send us here to work expect the Legislature to work, that we come here with a shared interest in promoting the common good and that we listen to one another when we bring forward suggestions to make legislation that makes people's lives better.

You know, the deeply cynical part of me wants to say that that never happens, and unfortunately we're here in this position where, yes, finally, in the 12 years that I've been here, it's happening one time, but I'm really pleased to have been a part of this tonight. I'm so glad that I can go back to the constituents that I represent and say: we did a good thing. So thank you to all of our members here tonight who are going to vote to support this amendment, and know that children are going to be safer in child care facilities because of what we've done here tonight.

Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. members, are there any others to speak to amendment A3?

Member Ceci: I'll speak to the amendment put forward by the minister. Flipping through Bill 35, I just don't see a definition there of a statutory director, and obviously that person on page 3 here is pretty critical in the whole line of reporting. If the minister were here, I'd maybe ask if . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, that is out of order.

Member Ceci: Sorry.

I would pose a question about who the statutory director is. I think it's someone from bureaucracy that is appointed by the minister to oversee child care, and that person's role is critical in the chain of events. It's not mentioned in my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar's defeated amendment, and I would have just asked who the statutory director is in this case.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others to amendment A3?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A3 carried]

The Chair: Are there any members that wish to speak to the bill as amended?

Seeing the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to the bill as amended, and I want to remind us, in the context of this bill, that universality of child care will only be possible when there is safety. Affordable and universal child care will not make sense when safety or quality is compromised. Those are the principles that cannot be shaken if you want to get a good quality, universal, and affordable child care in any given society.

Madam Chair, before I speak to the specifics of the bill, I want to tell this House about a little boy named Sean Lawal. Four years ago in my previous role I was sitting in a boardroom for a board meeting, and a member of the board walked into the room. Michael Lawal is his name. He walked into the room with a very big smile, the biggest smile that I have ever seen on his face. I asked Michael, shaking his hand, what was so special today. He seemed happier than I'd ever seen him. Then he looked at me and said: I got a grandson. Then he told me his name. "His name is Sean; Sean Lawal," Michael said. I still remember, Madam Chair, the bright in Michael's voice as he talked about the little boy.

8:10

Fast-forward. On September 20 of this year Michael called me. I picked up the phone expecting our usual conversation, and instead there was a silence, a long silence. Then he said four words that I will never forget. Michael said: I lost my grandson. Madam Chair, Sean Lawal was only four years old. I still remember the day Michael walked into the boardroom with a smile on his face and how happy he was with the arrival of Sean. And within four years, I got a call from Michael, letting me know that Sean left the world.

On September 15 Sean was dropped off at a daycare. He was later transported to a preschool in a daycare-operated vehicle, along with two other children. The other two children were dropped off in their school. Sean was the last one to be dropped at the second school. The school was not yet open. The driver, who was the child care person, and Sean were the only ones in the car. They waited for the school to open, about 15 minutes. According to the information provided to the Lawal family, Sean remained in the vehicle while staff waited for the school to open. During that time, Madam Chair, we don't know what happened. Sean was found unresponsive. Instead of calling 911, the driver called the daycare. There was time lost in between. Eventually, the child was taken to Grey Nuns hospital then transferred to Stollery hospital. In two days Sean was pronounced dead.

Madam Chair, every family that drops their children to the daycare, the least they expect is that safety is compromised. There are so many policy debates that we make in this Chamber. We debate regulations; we debate standards; we debate inspections; we debate compliance requirements, administrative processes. But I wanted to remind the House that behind all those compliances and standards and administrative processes there are lives, families that are impacted. Behind every regulation is a family placing their children with a child care provider, hoping the existing rules, regulations, and systems protect those children. Behind every single failure in oversight is a parent, a grandparent like Michael, a brother, a sister, or a loved one whose life can be changed forever. Last month I visited the family. They couldn't stop showing me photos and images of Sean Lawal celebrating his fourth birthday. They talked about him being dropped off, giving a kiss to his parents. None of those parents thought that would be the last kiss.

Madam Chair, I want to be very clear. Most child care operators and educators across the province are dedicated professionals who care deeply about the children they serve. They work hard every day to keep children safe. But when tragedy happens like this, our responsibility is to ask the real questions. How did this happen? How can a parent drop their child off, and in one hour get a call, just being told that they are in the emergency department? When the parents try to get the answer, they don't know the answer. All they know is that that child will not be back home.

As members of the Assembly we have a responsibility to not look away. Our responsibility is to ask those difficult questions. Are the safety standards strong enough? Are transportation protocols adequate? Are staff receiving the training they need? Are inspections identifying risks before tragedy occurs? I'm glad this bill is a step forward in terms of reporting critical incidents. The day that I visited Michael, he was wondering and asking me questions that I couldn't answer. He was asking if the other two children who were first dropped off were aware that Sean died in the same car. Have those parents been communicated? Michael did not know. The question that I have for members of the Assembly is: are we doing everything possible to prevent another family from receiving

a call that the Lawal family received? As a father I cannot imagine the pain of entrusting your child to care in the morning and learning an hour later that they will never make it home.

As legislators we have an obligation to ensure that every child in our province is protected by the strongest possible safeguards and that every parent can have confidence in the systems that we build in the province. Sean's story reminds us that these debates are not abstracts. They're about real lives, the lives of families and their loved ones. This bill is a step forward in reporting critical incidents, but the problem, I believe, is beyond that. The minister has a responsibility to make the safeguards needed for the safety of the children. The minister has an obligation to strengthen the quality of care that is provided to the children of this province.

Parents trust us. They trust us that we build systems that will strengthen the quality and the safety of those child care facilities. Sean's death must be a catalyst for strengthening safety. Sean's death must be a catalyst for accountability, and it must ignite an oversight throughout Alberta's child care system. No child should lose their life while in care, Madam Chair, and no family should ever have to endure the heartbreak that the Lawal family is living through today. I ask members of the House to take a minute and think about the life of Sean Lawal.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

8:20

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to speak to Bill 35, Education and Childcare (Securing Parental Involvement) Statutes Amendment Act, 2026. You know, the irony of the title "securing parental involvement" I find quite striking, when you think about the fact that this bill itself is discriminatory in the fact that it's not addressing all parents. It's actually neglecting parents of charter schools, parents of private schools, and the parents of unlicensed child care day homes.

You know, I think about when I first dropped off my little ones, my itty-bitty ones to daycare. I stood outside the fence and I wept and I wept. I was trusting strangers with the most valuable and important thing in my life, my babies. I commend the government for bringing forward a bill that is saying that we must, you know, ensure that if sexual abuse happens to a child, you notify the parents. If death happens, you immediately notify the parents and the police. That is a logical thing for all schools, all daycares, regardless if they're charter, private, unlicensed. They all receive public dollars. To me it's a discriminatory practice of negligence to these parents. You are neglecting their rights as parents to ensure that they are also notified if a violation happens to their children. It doesn't make any sense to me why you would neglect these parents. Why wouldn't you want them to know that their child has been molested, that their child has died in care? They should be immediately notified.

This process of protecting parental involvement actually explicitly negates parents. It is not allowing the parents of those three different structures – charter schools, private schools, and unlicensed child care facilities – to have the same rights to access. That makes no sense. That is illogical. Why would you deny parents the same rights? That in itself I could go on and on about because it makes no sense to me why you would deny some parents access to knowledge, to protecting their children. I have a hard time believing that parents of charter schools and private schools don't want their children to also be protected at the same level. I have a hard time believing that those parents don't want to know when their children were molested. I have a hard time believing that those children don't want the same assurances as other parents. That's absolutely illogical.

Then I think about the small providers. This Bill 35 creates a whole lot of work for facilities, for schools, for child care, for daycare. Is the government going to invest additional dollars for the administrative burden now that you've put on the institutions? This is work. This is going to be work for people who are already overburdened. We know that children take up all kinds of time and resources. You have put on an extra burden without, again, a budget line. This government seems to be infamous for creating work without putting a budget line with that work. We've seen, you know, folks respond to that, notwithstanding teachers.

I want to thank, also, my colleagues for bringing forward two really powerful amendments. You know, my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud brought forward the amendment of recognizing – so this government had the opportunity to recognize parents and families who send their children to charter schools and private schools and unlicensed daycares. My colleague brought forward an amendment, and this government denied the rights to those parents right here in this Legislature.

I want to thank my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar. Had he not stood up and talked about the horrific incident that took place in his constituency, we wouldn't be here tonight with the work that we have. He brought forward a critical amendment that this government adapted and modified and brought forward as their own amendment, so thank you for doing that work because I know we all agree that the protection of our itty-bitties, our little ones, is fundamental to each and every one of us in this House.

Hay-hay. Nanaskamon, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there others? Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 35 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? That is carried.

Bill 40
Electoral Divisions Act
(continued)

The Chair: We'll go to Bill 40. There are 22 minutes remaining. I am looking for members who wish to speak to Bill 40.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Member Tejada: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to speak against Bill 40 because, along with my NDP caucus colleagues, I believe in free and fair elections. I believe in democracy. I respect the Electoral Boundaries Commission, which has been in place now for over 30 years, and reject the UCP's sham of a process that was put in place when they decided that the voices of thousands of Albertans just didn't work for them.

By the way, I really do have to give props to the Justice minister and to the Government House Leader for having the wherewithal to get up and lecture members of our caucus about respecting process. Ten out of ten recommend that this government go ahead and try respecting process. I promise it's not too late.

Albertans know that this government will do anything to win, and that is evidenced by this sad display of the UCP's desperation in redrawing maps. All partisanship aside, this is not about which political parties will win more seats, but how Albertans lose when

they lose trust in procedural fairness and when politicians disrespect, manipulate, and subvert democracy.

Albertans should know that this government is trying to rig not just the next election, but elections for years to come. That's the UCP's attempt to gerrymander, and it is a giant red flag. Albertans know that this is not normal, that there is no so-called levelling of the playing field but instead a deep and lasting betrayal of Albertans when it comes to the foundational – and I'll borrow a phrase from the members opposite – birthright, when it comes to the right to vote. Of course, this right is not only conferred by birth, as much as the UCP loves to bandy around that term. It is also conferred by citizenship. That's right: citizenship, another concept that is regularly weaponized by the UCP. But they don't respect that when it comes to Albertans' right to free and fair elections. The UCP cares about power, not the democratic rights of Albertans, not about what their priorities are, and given the chance to do the right thing or to choose themselves, we know what choice they'll make. They choose themselves every time.

8:30

So here's the background for people who might not be as familiar. The legislated and usually routine process to review Alberta's electoral maps has been around for decades. Every eight to 10 years an independent commission consults the public and does careful analysis to redraw maps to reflect population growth, demographic change, and to keep communities together. The most recent boundary commission process was held around 2016-2017, and the next slated review was for 2025 to 2027.

I've said this before in this House. The UCP love to tell on themselves. I don't want to trigger anyone over there after this government had to backpedal on the embarrassing order that they tried to impose on schools around flagpoles, but maybe this will serve as a reminder that consultation is a gift.

What I will say is that Albertans see lots of red flags throughout the UCP's efforts to undermine democracy. That first red flag? Albertans knew that something was afoot in 2024, when the UCP amended the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act to exclude existing community and city boundaries, especially when it comes to Calgary and Edmonton. The Electoral Boundaries Commission was appointed in March of '25: two commissioners appointed by the UCP, two appointed by the NDP, and one chair, Justice Dallas Miller. Consultations were done, including hundreds of written and oral submissions across the province. The commission released an interim report in November of 2025, which both the UCP- and NDP-appointed members and the chair voted for unanimously. The commission held yet another round of public consultations, which resulted in over 1,000 more submissions, almost too much consultation with Albertans for this government to tolerate, as we would soon find out.

That brings us to the final report. In March of '26 the commission delivered its final report, recommending an 89-seat map based on extensive public input. Sounds a lot like direct democracy, and I know the folks opposite are fans of that or so they tell us.

Wait. There's another red flag. The two UCP-appointed commissioners then changed their minds, opposing the map despite previously supporting the report and the recommendations. Not only that but proposed new maps that nobody asked for, highly hybridized maps with distinctly partisan implications that favoured the UCP: there's another red flag.

And now for the oft-misrepresented and cherry-picked recommendation from the chair. Justice Miller issued an addendum expressing concerns about the minority report's constitutional issues and affirmed the majority report. He suggested two additional seats to restore rural representation in order to prevent this government from accepting the minority report, which was full of problems. And his recommendation came with the express condition that the majority map remain intact and provided specific guidelines about what should not be changed.

I think that at this point I should probably just stop counting red flags. Rather than hold a vote on the majority's recommendations, the UCP passed Government Motion 37 to establish a government-controlled special select committee and external panel to develop a 91-seat map and redraw it at will. Our caucus members opposed this steamrolling of the legitimate process, but we had to show up and defend democracy in Alberta because we know that the UCP will not do that.

The Select Special Committee on Electoral Boundaries presented some more red flags. Over six meetings the NDP members fought for transparency, less partisan interference, and a return to the commission's majority report. Every proposal they submitted was voted down by the UCP members. The UCP even commissioned polling services, again, something never seen before when redrawing electoral boundaries. Another major red flag.

And in the never-ending arrogance that has become the UCP brand, they would like the NDP members to thank the UCP members for generously letting us keep the seats they deem appropriate. Unfortunately, that's not how democracy works, Madam Chair. Albertans decide who gets those seats, not the UCP. Both the Acting Chief Justice and the Canadian Bar Association raised concerns about the irregular process. They raised red flags. True to form, NDP members were blocked from adding observations to the final report, forcing them to issue a minority report of their own. So much for free speech.

What this government is trying to ram through now are maps that they had a heavy hand in drawing, not based on consultation, not based on respect for the democratic process, and an absolute shame which has not been seen in the history of this country. The UCP could have chosen to do the right thing and pass the independent and transparent map created by the Electoral Boundaries Commission, but they didn't. So here we are.

We do not support or agree with the UCP map that violates their own Government Motion 37 by gerrymandering ridings south of Airdrie, diluting voter parity, and ensuring some votes count more than others. The new UCP map carves Lethbridge into four ridings and wildly expands Calgary ridings outside of the city boundaries. The UCP map disrespects and waters down your vote, all to protect the UCP and their cabinet ministers. Albertans deserve to have their votes matter at the ballot box. This illegitimate process has produced a map where all Albertans lose and is rife with red flags. They are not good for rural Albertans or urban Albertans. These maps serve only the Premier and the UCP in their quest for power.

The thing is that hanging on to power at all costs is not how you earn trust or respect. This government has made a terrible miscalculation and has taken rural and city voters for granted. They will not stand for it. What do they call this? I think the find-out stage. Albertans deserve a government that respects independent processes. They deserve electoral boundaries that are drawn in the public interest, not for partisan gain. They deserve a government that takes into account public consultation and treats it like the gift that it is. They deserve a democracy where voters choose politicians, not one where politicians choose their voters. They deserve an NDP government that respects their voices and will restore that trust.

I'll just say this again: politicians should not choose their voters, but voters should choose their politicians. And despite the best efforts of this government, the voters should win. The voters should get fairness. They won't forget, and they won't allow this blatant disregard for their voices. Albertans deserve better, and this bill

doesn't cut it. I urge all members to vote against Bill 40 and stand up for democracy.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Madam Chair. The debate about Bill 40, the Electoral Divisions Act, is not about maps and electoral district boundary lines, as the government thinks. It is about whether Albertans can have confidence that our democratic institutions, our processes are being protected, they're being respected, and they're kept free from partisan interference, particularly when the party has an interest in the decision-making processes. This is where not only perceived but a real conflict of interest arises in our democratic institutions. The decisions made in Bill 40 will shape how Albertans are represented in this Legislature for years if not decades. These electoral boundaries maps will determine whether Albertans believe politicians are respecting the democratic process they themselves set or are manipulating whenever it doesn't suit them for their political advantage.

I do have many concerns on this bill and the boundaries that have been presented and the whole process that we went through. But I would like to focus on two major concerns with the maps that are proposed in Bill 40. First, the proposed map raises serious concerns about effective representation and Charter rights, and this has been raised by members of the Chamber in the debate this afternoon. The second one is that the proposed map further dilutes the voter parity, particularly for Albertans living in our largest urban centres.

8:40

Madam Chair, the first concern is that the proposed map raises questions about Charter rights to effective representation. Section 3 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees every citizen the right to vote. However, the caveat here is that the courts have made clear that this right is not simply about casting a ballot. It's about meaningful and effective representation. The Supreme Court of Canada has long recognized that effective representation requires more than numerical calculations of how many votes have been cast. It requires respect for communities of interest, it requires maintaining meaningful connections between residents and their elected representatives, it requires boundaries that allow MLAs to effectively advocate for communities they serve, and it requires a process that places the rights of the voters above the interest of the politicians. For decades Alberta has protected these principles by relying on independent electoral boundary commissions. Successive governments respected that process. Regardless of political differences, governments recognized a simple democratic principle: voters should choose politicians, not the other way around.

The temptation for governments to redraw boundaries for partisan gain has always existed. That's precisely why independent commissions were established. The concerns surrounding, for example, in this case – and this has been debated by the members of the House. The Lethbridge situation illustrates why this issue is so important. Under the proposed maps that are presented through Bill 40, Lethbridge will be divided into one significantly overpopulated urban constituency and three sprawling rural-urban hybrid constituencies stretching far beyond the city boundaries.

This arrangement weakens community cohesion. It divides residents who share common municipal issues, economic realities, and community interests. Instead of strengthening representation, this kind of process weakens representation. It actually fragments it. It dilutes it. The result is diminished representation for urban voters and reduced recognition of Lethbridge as a distinct community of interest. These are not minor concerns. These go directly into the constitutional principle of effective representation.

My second concern is diluting urban voting power. Every Albertan understands that representation by population cannot be perfect, but we have to try in the best possible way. That's why we bring in an independent commission, not only an independent commission, but that's why we allow citizens to participate and contribute to the process. Not only contributions, but also those contributions have to reflect the outcome of the process. This report doesn't. The majority report did, but this government refused it.

The proposed map moves Alberta farther away from voter parity. It worsens the underrepresentation of Alberta's four largest cities. Edmonton, Calgary, Lethbridge, Red Deer continue to experience population growth. Instead of improving representation in rapidly growing urban centres, this legislation further weakens the relative voting power of the same residents in urban centres. In the proposed map presented in Bill 40, one riding would contain approximately 28,700 residents while another one would contain more than 63,000 residents. That's close to double. Actually, more than. In practical terms that means a vote in a smaller riding carries more than twice the weight of a vote in a larger riding. That's what voter parity means.

Madam Chair, that should concern every member in this Assembly. The principle here is simple. Democratic representation should not depend on one's postal code. A resident in Edmonton should not have significantly less influence than a resident elsewhere simply because of where they happen to live. A resident in Calgary should not see the value of their vote diminish just because their community is growing. Yet that is precisely what Bill 40 is presenting, the maps that are presented in Bill 40. That represents approximately a 14 per cent difference in riding size.

As populations increase in our major urban centres, their representation should not fall further behind. Previous electoral boundary commissions understood this challenge, Madam Chair. When Edmonton and Calgary experienced rapid growth, commissions often recommended additional seats or adjustments that maintain reasonable population balance. The objective was simple: preserve effective representation while protecting voter parity. This gerrymandering abandons that principle and that approach.

Madam Chair, democracy functions when citizens trust the rules, and that includes the systems and the process. Once you ruin the system and the process, the trust erodes, and when trust erodes, citizens lose confidence in their own democratic processes. Citizens must believe that electoral boundaries are drawn fairly. Albertans must believe that their vote matters equally. Neither of those are possible under Bill 40. Albertans must believe that politicians are not manipulating the system for their partisan benefit. Unfortunately, Bill 40 fails that test.

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt but pursuant to Government Motion 48, agreed to earlier today, which states that after one hour of debate all questions must now be decided to conclude consideration of Bill 40 in Committee of the Whole, I will now call the following question on Bill 40, the Electoral Divisions Act.

[The voice vote indicated that the clauses of Bill 40 were agreed to]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:49 p.m.]

[Three minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

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

Against:		
Boparai	Hayter	Kayande
Calahoo Stonehouse	Hoffman	Miyashiro
Campbell	Hoyle	Shepherd
Ceci	Irwin	Sweet
Dach	Kasawski	Tejada
Haji		

Totals: For – 43 Against – 16

[The clauses of Bill 40 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

Bill 41
Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2026 (No. 2)

The Chair: I see the hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise in Committee of the Whole to speak to Bill 41 and to move it, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2026 (No. 2). I look forward to hearing the debate on this important bill and hope it will enjoy the support of the House.

The Chair: Are there others? [interjections] Order. Order.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Chair. I wish I shared the excitement about Bill 41, Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2026 (No. 2).

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

I think what I will need to say about it is that I wanted to thank the Member for Lethbridge-West for bringing into the debate earlier today something that would have made my grade 11 English teacher, Agnes Lynas, very proud. Agnes was a beloved English teacher who brought to life Shakespeare in her classroom. She made certain that everybody understood the value of Shakespeare and writing and important literature. No matter whether you were planning to be a teacher, whether you were thinking about being a baker or a plumber or going on to university.

Agnes Lynas brought literature to life in that English 30 class, and so did the Member for Lethbridge-West today in earlier debate on Bill 40 when the member began a Shakespearean theme in the Legislature. The Member for Lethbridge-West referenced *Hamlet* while speaking about Bill 40, Mr. Chair, a classic tragedy, resembling, of course, the similar style of Bill 40, which one would I think describe equally as a classic tragedy when it comes to democracy and how it treats our most sacred tenets of the system that we use to elect representative governments.

The other Shakespeare piece, Mr. Chair, was something that came upon me as I was thinking about the different debates of today. It came to me as: democracy, oh, democracy; how do I love thee? Let me count the ways. Now, this is mistakenly attributed to Shakespeare. Agnes Lynas would be very, very pleased to know that I've caught the distinction. It was actually Elizabeth Barrett Browning who drafted this poem. It's something that I hearken to when I think about what's happening to the tenets of our democracy under the legislation we were debating earlier today and continues under Bill 41.

The third piece of literature that comes to mind is also another piece of Shakespearean literature which reminds me a lot about Bill 41, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2026, and it's *Much Ado about Nothing*. That's kind of what we're dealing with here, Mr. Chair. It is a fairly lengthy piece of legislation which does a number of things that are basically intended to update current legislation so that everything fits together.

The play *Much Ado about Nothing* was set in Messina. It revolves around two romantic pairings that emerged when a group of soldiers arrived in town. To get to the bottom line, the title's play on words references the secrets and trickery that form the backbone of the play's comedy, intrigue, and action. Plays on words is what we've been dealing with all afternoon in this Legislature, Mr. Chair. Bill 41 is another example of this.

9:00

The lessons that Agnes Lynas, my grade 11 English teacher, would love us to continue would be to always look towards literature to describe current day debate in this Legislature and beyond no matter what role you occupy in life, as a worker or as a professional or as an individual who raises a family. I hope that everybody in this Legislature takes it seriously when we look at trying to come to terms with legislation that may seem like housekeeping or much ado about nothing when, in fact, it actually really does have impact on the lives of people who are touched by this; for example, Mr. Chair, this bill, which I'm planning to oppose and I encourage all those in the House to do so as well, with respect to auto insurance.

Now, the UCP allowed auto insurance rates to get out of control for years after they removed the insurance rate cap that the NDP brought in when we were in power. Now they're still trying to clean up the mess that they created. Much ado about nothing? I'm not sure.

I had a constituent report to me, that – of course, we all know the UCP has allowed auto insurance rates to increase much faster than inflation. Who would have known, Mr. Chair, that a first-time driver in my constituency is facing a $7,000 first-time driver insurance bill to get insurance so he can drive and actually apply for a job. That is completely prohibitive. It's certainly not much ado about nothing. It's an absolutely brick wall for this young man to enter employment, to enter the workforce.

How in the world, Mr. Chair, can we expect young people to gain employment when this type of a barrier, this financial barrier, one that is not only beyond the ability of this young man to handle but also family is not able to handle that type of a financial burden as well – the individual is now forced to be looking for work that doesn't involve a driver's licence, doesn't involve driving a car or

a truck, and severely limits the employment opportunities for this individual.

We, the Alberta New Democrats, understand how expensive it's become to drive in Alberta under the UCP. Even under the UCP government's plan Alberta will still have amongst the highest – amongst the highest – auto insurance rates in Canada. They like to boast about what they would save or what they would say. There are even commercials on television boasting that they're going to save under this new no-fault model of insurance. Well, this no-fault model is basically the worst of both worlds, as described by many critics. The potential savings under the no-fault model are only a fraction – a fraction – of the increased auto insurance costs that Albertans have faced since the UCP came to power. You may say that your rate is actually going down, but it only represents a fraction of what they went up before we see this decrease and this introduction of no-fault private insurance, this hybrid model that serves nobody.

Alberta drivers are still paying significantly more than those in other provinces with comparable insurance costs that Albertans have faced since the UCP came to power. Albertan drivers are still paying significantly more than those in other provinces, with comparable drivers in B.C., Saskatchewan, and Manitoba paying hundreds less – hundreds less – Mr. Chair. It's the worst of both worlds. Yet this government is boasting about this no-fault model as the best they potentially could do.

Now, private insurers are asking people to trust that their prices will go down. We've heard this song and dance before, Mr. Chair. "Trust us. The rates will come down," while also pushing to remove caps on how much they can raise rates. Now, that's certainly a bit of doublespeak if I ever heard it. How much would they raise the rates if we were able to remove the caps once again and see that a young man now paying $7,000 for his insurance would see the sky being the limit as if $7,000 wasn't enough. This is why the government needs to step in to protect affordability for Albertans.

That's what the Alberta NDP affordability agenda delivers – lower utility bills, better wages, fairer grocery prices, and an end to hidden fees – real savings families can count on every single month, not this Dani dimes gas tax relief bait-and-switch process that we've gone through over the last number of months.

With that, Mr. Chair, I will cede the balance of my time and invite others in the Legislature to comment on this rather large and Shakespearean experiment. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I very much enjoyed listening to the Member for Edmonton-McClung talk about *Much Ado about Nothing*, a movie with Emma Thompson and Kenneth Branagh. It was awesome, so thank you for that trip down memory lane.

It's my pleasure to rise on Bill 41, talking about insurance one more time. Is it me? If the government were actually – like, if I were in this business, if I were anybody who was involved in insurance, I feel like it would make me nervous that the government has spent – I don't know – three, four years doing this no-fault model that has never been seen before in Canada, probably nowhere else in the United States either, a completely made-in-Alberta solution as they call it, or as we sometimes think about them, the science projects that this ideological government is imposing on people.

You know, the first time: a big, thick insurance bill with a whole bunch of stuff in it, and it's, like, "Oh, is this thing baked?" No one has ever done this before. Have you baked it? "Oh, yeah, yeah. Trust us. It's baked. It's completely baked." What about this part that's missing here? "Oh, regulation. Don't worry about it." Then the regulations come out, and it turns out: screech. Got to go back, put a few things in legislation, fix it, publish the regulations, not quite right, go back, fix it. Here we are a month away from launch, a month away from launching something that has never been done before in Canada, and we're back at it again.

So good luck, guys. They're wearing it. It's funny, and I shouldn't be laughing because it's the people of Alberta who are going to be wearing this mess. I don't know about you, but it doesn't give me a whole lot of confidence when the government is making flat legislative changes a month before launch in order to actually launch this thing. I feel like it's going to be gas tax rebate: the actual thing. Right? Like, that was just a preamble. That was the test for this government that figures that they could, you know, kind of half bake this ideological cake and fix it later. We'll see. Super excited. Good luck.

Now, another piece in this legislation is something I want to talk about: the types of variable annuities that are in there, and this is a new financial product. Economists for many, many years, decades, have always wondered: "Look. Why do more people not buy annuities when they retire?" Because it's kind of a no-brainer. Right?

9:10

Like, what an annuity does is that it prevents people from being subject to the whims of a market when, frankly, as you get older, your ability as a retiree to recover from market crashes is, you know, exponentially declining. It makes sense to send that risk over to an insurance company, but the problem is that this is kind of a Groucho Marx problem, because what Groucho Marx once said very famously is: I would never be a member of any club that would have me.

The problem with annuities is that when people are looking at their risks, it turns out that it is only the healthiest retirees who expect to live a long time who actually buy these things. What that does is that it squeezes the risk pool down. Of course, when you're an insurance company, people who live a long time and you're selling them an annuity, those are bad risks. What it does is that it squeezes the risk pool down to the worst risks. They've got to increase the price of that annuity. Fewer people join that risk pool because it becomes a worse deal for them, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera until the annuities are so expensive that it doesn't really make a whole lot of sense.

A bunch of proposals have been made to try and fix that. Certainly, these variable annuities that are now legalized are one of those approaches. I mean, look, the challenge here: this goes back to the operation of government, the ability to execute. I hope, I guess, that the government has thought through things that can go wrong.

The problem is that new financial products are often not what they've been cracked up to be. The great Paul Volcker, who was the Federal Reserve chair for many years in the United States during the Reagan administration, Carter and Reagan, I guess, said that – Sorry. No. It wasn't Paul Volcker. It was the guy who started Vanguard, Bogle. He said that there were two real innovations, only two financial innovations in the last 50 years that have actually helped people. One is the ATM; the second is the index fund.

I'll, you know, finish with that I hope that this helps solve the annuity problem. Annuities have nontransparent fees. They do have, you know, fairly high sales commissions in some cases. I hope that the industry is extremely responsible in whom they sell these things to and that the government is very good at monitoring them.

Bill 41: let's talk about affordability. You know, the whole insurance debacle now reminds me of how little this government

has actually done to address the affordability challenges of ordinary Albertans. Insurance has gone up a lot. It's gone up by some 30 per cent since the UCP was first elected. Admittedly, it's a hard problem to solve. It really requires a lot of technical expertise. It requires a regulatory touch. It requires multiple stakeholders all having different points of view. Like, even the best government would have a challenge addressing auto insurance. Sadly, we kind of don't have that Platonic ideal of the theoretical best government in this province.

Auto insurance rates are screaming higher. Maybe with this no-fault model people will be taken care of, although I want to be very clear that if the insurance company cuts you off, that's too bad; you're the cost of doing business. You're the broken eggs that this insurance omelette has been made of by this government. Sorry about that. That's this government. I am deeply sorry about people who are going to get cut off who still need treatment. That's awful, and I think there should be some recourse for you. It's going to be tough to find it. I'm really sorry about that.

But it's supposed to save us money, right? Well, it actually doesn't save the same amount of money as some of the other alternatives that were made in the Wyman and Nous reports. In fact, we're living in a world where your insurance may have gone up by $600, $700 over the last six years and it's now going to go down by maybe $100 or $200. Congratulations, according to this government. It's the same thing they did with property taxes in Calgary-Elbow, where it goes up by $400 in one year and $500 in the next and then you get $100 back and you're supposed to be thankful for it. Still worse off. Everyone knows that they're worse off.

This experimental, science-project no-fault insurance model, privately delivered, exists nowhere else in Canada. We have said on this side of the House over and over again: are you really sure, government, that you know what you're doing? What we have seen from the challenges of affordability, the very many challenges that this government has created for ordinary people – the failing health care system, the security situation, just everything that doesn't work in this province – I just don't have a whole lot of confidence.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: I recognize the Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my privilege to get up and speak briefly to Bill 41, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2026 (No. 2), and to spend some time speaking to some of the items in this 290-page omnibus bill. My understanding of omnibus bills is that they tend to clean up a lot of things that need cleaning up in legislation. If we can review the bill quickly, it amends 15 pieces of legislation. A significant number of those are in the auto insurance area, the regulations to follow. That'll come and be alive on January 1, 2027, so just a few short months. After that there are also a number of parts under TBF's jurisdiction, like personal income tax. It has to do with I think my colleague referred to it as the $100 of Dani dollars that people could apply for. In any event, there are a number of acts that are being cleaned up under TBF, and after that there are some that are in the area of Assisted Living and Social Services and one in the area of Hospital and Surgical Health Services.

As I said, legislation connected to many of these changes comes in the area of auto insurance, the no-fault auto insurance that will begin soon. You know, if you read through, look through the number of pages here, there are a lot of changes to existing acts that really are lifted out and put into a different act. So things are moved around from one act to another, resulting in some consequential changes that need to be identified and also worked on.

Just a point on the auto insurance. When we were government, 2015 to 2019, there were significant challenges around auto insurance at that time, too. What we did to address those challenges was to put a rate cap. I think it was about 5 per cent at the last couple of years. Insurance could only go up 5 per cent until we had a way to examine with the insurance companies where the increases that they believed needed to be levied on Albertans were coming from. The rate board was seeing significant increases of upwards of 11 per cent and more from individual companies wanting that in the subsequent years of insurance from their customers.

9:20

We said that people can't afford that. Why is it going up so much? We said: we want to work with you. We told them that, you know, until we have a good understanding of where those increases are coming from, we're going to cap auto insurance at 5 per cent. They didn't like that, but we asked them to sit down with us, sit down with bureaucracy and show where the legitimate increases were coming from. And the story is unfortunate because the rate cap was taken off almost as one of the first things that the Kenney government did, and we saw increases to people's auto insurance balloon. One of my colleagues said 30 per cent increases over a couple of three years. That happened, and that was under the UCP government.

What we see today are a number of changes coming forward in the whole area of auto insurance to prepare for January 1 no-fault, and that forms a substantial part of this. I should have mentioned that I won't be supporting what's before us today. I'll be opposing this bill, and I think there's good reason to oppose it. I'm opposing it in part because Albertans will be paying ever-increasing amounts for auto insurance under this scheme.

Another focus I want to just briefly bring to Bill 41 is the whole refundable tax credit. I mentioned it as Dani dollars. You know, there were many people who came to the office, contacted the office and said that they're uncomfortable with the scheme set up by this government with regard to giving a rebate of $100 for affordability challenges. They were uncomfortable because the government was asking for information about bank accounts, the individuals.

This side proposed a more eloquent, immediate kind of solution to all of that, which was refused and ultimately taken up by the government in October. But we proposed it early on in the summer months to help Albertans with the cost of gas at the pump. Upwards of close to $2 was a typical kind of litre cost that Albertans were paying. We said, "Why don't you take the 13 cents that the provincial government collects on every litre off; it would help every person who fills up their tank," instead of what we saw from this government. I think it was about 2.6 million Albertans that were eligible for this Dani dollars. Only about 1.6 million of them took it up. There it is. Only about 1.6 million out of the 3.4 million eligible Albertans applied for and received the money.

A more streamlined, immediate way of dealing with that would have been to treat all Albertans the same. You fill up your car, you fill up your truck: you get the 13 cents off. That was followed, unfortunately, after the summer months, after the holiday season where Albertans are looking for ways to be able to save money when they want to go on vacation. That was made more expensive by this government.

I do see one thing I like in this report. Unfortunately, I can't pull that out and vote for it on its own. It's the reference to the Securities Act. I see that the CEO of Alberta securities likes what is being proposed here. It treats securities in a harmonious way with other jurisdictions, and they have the ability to better protect investors. So that one piece is helpful.

The rest of it is, again, not in keeping with what Albertans need, what Albertans want. The immediacy of reductions to costs is not there. This government does not care about that thing, that part of supporting and working with Albertans. They make life more expensive with every turn.

The whole aspect of the no-fault insurance is going to be something that I think is going to be difficult for Albertans to get their heads around. Policies will have to be developed, and it's not just a few policies. Everybody who has a policy and who drives will have to have a new policy from their insurance company starting in January 2027, and that'll pose a huge bureaucratic challenge for not only the companies but Albertans to ensure that they're getting the coverage that they need.

With that kind of reviewed, I'll just listen to the views of my colleagues. Of course, Bill 41, this omnibus bill, is not something I support.

Thank you very much.

Member Campbell: This year, rather than lower costs or tackle affordability head-on, the UCP government launched that $100 one-time Alberta energy rebate, which my colleague spoke to I think quite effectively, especially citing some of the most prominent statistics about it. Unsurprisingly, this did not slay the affordability dragon, with cost of living still remarkably high for so many Albertans.

Actually, it's probably worth reflecting on what this government considers to be a $100 affordability solution. What does that say about the scooping up of $200 a month from disability claimants? If a hundred bucks is enough to move the needle on affordability, what are we saying to the disability community by taking $200 from them? I think there are some comments on the logic of this, but we'll just carry on with the subject matter at hand.

Now, this program had rolled out with significant hiccups. First was the contrast between the Ralph bucks of the past, $400, and the $100 of the Dani dollars in 2026. It required Albertans to go hat in hand to the government's portal to input significant personal information, much of which Albertans objected to, especially the scooping up of banking information when secretly, if you clicked to the bottom of the list and said, "I don't bank with any of these guys," you could have just gotten it by Interac e-transfer, which is pretty darn easy. I was not paid to say that. And it could have been automatic. Why require people at all to go to this portal, to input all of this personal information and hand it over to this UCP government?

Now, this bill today makes this type of initiative easier. You might not know, but we're leading up to an election year. Does this seem like unusual timing to make it easier for this benevolent UCP government to provide checks directly to Albertans in an election year? Shocking.

Now, this direct-to-voter cash scheme is actually deeply inefficient. Businesses and taxpayers – well, let's talk businesses first. Businesses have to scoop up taxes from every transaction or however they remit their taxes to the provincial government – it could be the taxes on health care employee benefits insurance or other similar mechanisms – and the government needs to reconcile what they've received versus what they expected from these businesses, which takes manpower. Now the government needs to determine distribution of the funds. Who is eligible? What are the criteria? How much are we going to give? Then the government has to actually distribute the money, set up the portal, make sure that people are not making fraudulent claims. All of these steps in the chain of events cost administrative money. It is wickedly inefficient to scoop up tax dollars from Albertans and then to hand it back to them. That just doesn't make sense.

Now, apparently, 3.4 million Albertans were eligible for this, for a total of $340 million, and as my colleague said, only 1.45 million of them have actually completed the application as of September 30, 2026. That means 43 per cent of eligible Albertans completed the required actions. That grade might work with the minister of education's new graduation goals, but most Albertans would consider 43 per cent a failing grade.

So why is this government entrenching this grand flop of a program into Alberta's legislation? Again, that whole timing of 12 months to an election seems a little bit fishy. What do Albertans actually expect this Chamber to do with record oil and gas royalty revenue? We know that, as we've seen over the last 50 years, oil prices rise and fall, and today every dollar of the price of a barrel of oil results in about a $600 million swing to Alberta's financial fortunes.

9:30

Now, people might expect that we should be saving money in a boom and making investments in significant capital improvements. Those are one-time costs that don't have recurring year-after-year commitments. That makes a lot of sense. But this legislation seems to be indicating that maybe we can just take these amazing, limited-time gigantic profits that we get from our oil and gas royalties and just hand it out the door, knowing that it might not reoccur or knowing that the price of a barrel of oil is nothing to be counted on, as we've seen in the last decade.

Now what could we be doing with this instead of creating easier access cash to direct voters at the discretion of the UCP government? What about that long-awaited Edmonton hospital or remote roads to better serve rural Alberta and rural industry? These sorts of things make really meaningful changes to Albertans and can improve access to public health care, public education, or even significant permanent improvements to economic factors in the province.

Further, entrenching this type of legislation is a short-term vision. It serves modest political aims but has no true value for Albertans. Now, that is unless this government is actually desiring to permanently add Albertans to the public payroll, but I imagine that's not quite the initiative we're going for here. So I'm opposed to the shuttling of public funds inefficiently back to the public.

We could address inflation or build capital infrastructure. I know that the province likes to kick around the idea of between city railroad designs and plans. Heck, that'd be amazing. If you had $340 million to splash around, what I wouldn't do is give everyone a $100 cheque. Now, I thought about what I'd do with mine, and I thought I'd just fund the services that this government decided not to, and I encourage my neighbours to do the same. If you're upset about the level of health care funding in the province, maybe give it to a cancer charity, give it to a disability advocacy group, give it to your favourite political party if that's your interest. Now, as we know, the government does not have a silver bullet to affordability, but I do think that we have the tools in this Legislature to make meaningful progress on this issue and to address it, especially given the pressing magnitude of the crisis that Albertans are facing today.

Bill 41 squeezes together several subjects into this one same bill. A big part of this is actually changes to stand-alone public reporting for health subsidiaries such as EMS. Now, this actually comes at a time when EMS is a subject of hot debate. There are some concerns about whether an ambulance will show up when you call it. There was that very notable recent example of a 90-minute wait for a person who later passed away from their medical emergency.

I visited the Walden fire department just this last week and asked them how often do they make it to the scene of a call where both the fire department and EMS have been called to the same incident,

and they said: every single time the fire department will arrive before EMS. Is that the level of service that we expect from our public institutions? Is this a subject matter that we'd want to hide behind opaque reporting? Do we as a public deserve to have public reporting on this very important subject matter and other health subsidiaries? I would argue yes. Too much of our health care system lacks effective public reporting.

Now, this morning, actually, I thought we saw a really spectacular example of this. There was a question queried to the Minister of Hospital and Surgical Health Services about wait times for surgeries. In response we got metrics on surgeries completed. That's actually a little bit of an apples and oranges discussion here. Too much of our health care discussions is based on apples and oranges comparison. Publicly reported statistics and figures give a level playing field for what we can discuss and how we can measure our progress year over year. They give us a frame of reference so that we can have productive conversations rather than talking past one another.

The other thing about nice, accessible metrics is that they add nuance. You can tease information out from data. There are whole fields of people whose entire careers are dedicated to finding insights from data, and having that accessible to the public and clearly delineated between health care subsidiaries is good for health care.

Now, a formative quote from my younger years, although some of my colleagues may say that all of my years so far have been younger years, rings in my ears. When we deal in generalities, we shall never succeed. When we deal in specifics, we shall rarely have a failure. When performance is measured, performance improves. When performance is measured and reported, the rate of performance accelerates. I think this holds true for our health care system, and I think that this is so important for the discussion and this small sliver of Bill 41.

The changes in this bill to reporting utilize the timeless wisdom: trust me, bro. In tandem with the reduction in transparency, it also shifts health care decision-making from the Legislature to the minister and the cabinet. Trust me, bro. Critical information that is currently provided such as deficits, staffing shortages, overtime costs, response time performance, or adverse audit findings could be tucked away in the much larger consolidated reports, lowering the public profile of critical failings. Sure, on paper accountability is not eliminated, but the amendments certainly make it harder for operational and financial problems to be visible and more difficult for the public and MLAs to scrutinize.

Do we want a murky, opaque Alberta? Do we want a murky and opaque Alberta Health Services or any of the subsidiary organizations of which it is composed? I would say no. Is this what we want to leave behind for generations to come? When I worked at a major oil and gas player on a significant project, we had a dashboard of what was happening at site. It was very clear for senior management and mid-level managers to understand what was happening. Albertans deserve something like this. As we remove reporting, we do a disservice to Albertans and the services that they rely on.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for the opportunity to rise to speak to Bill 41, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2026 (No. 2), one of the most important economic issues, I believe, facing Alberta's future. The question is: how do we attract investment, create opportunities, and build long-term prosperity for our next generation? For the next 10 minutes I'm going to sound a little bit like I'm speaking the UCP's love language. I'm going to talk about cutting barriers, attracting investment, building businesses, supporting entrepreneurs, encouraging private capital, and creating economic growth. But here's the problem. While those may be the government's favourite words, investors see this government using an entirely different language.

Investors don't fall in love with governance reviews. They don't get excited about organizational charts. They don't write cheques because the government created another layer of administration. Investors speak the language of certainty, efficiency, and opportunity. The government, honestly, has a lot of security reform being discussed today, but absolutely none of it is speaking to investor language. That's a problem because security regulation is about much more than just the rules.

When Albertans hear the phrase "securities regulations," most think about investors' protection, compliance, disclosure requirements, and, of course, oversight. And all of those are very important. We need transparent markets. We need strong investor protections. We need confidence in the integrity of our financial systems. But regulation is only one side of the overall equation. What we really need is growth. A security framework is one of the most powerful economic development tools any government possesses. It determines how easily a company can raise capital. It influences whether entrepreneurs launch their business in Alberta or somewhere else. It affects where investors see this province as a place to deploy capital, and ultimately it determines how many jobs, businesses, innovations, and opportunities are created here in our province.

9:40

That is why every security reform should be judged by one simple question: will it attract more investment into Alberta? Not whether it changes governance structures, not whether it creates new reporting requirements, not whether it reorganizes the bureaucracy, but will it actually attract more investment? Investment is what drives our opportunity. Investment funds innovation. It funds jobs, it creates jobs, and it grows businesses. Investment generates tax revenue while paying for public services. Investment is how economies grow. And if our reform is not making Alberta more attractive to investors, then I think we're missing a tremendous opportunity.

The challenge facing Alberta is pretty simple. We are no longer competing with only our neighbouring provinces. We're now competing with Texas, with Arizona, with Colorado, with Singapore. We compete with those jurisdictions around the world, and they are aggressively pursuing our capital and our investments. Today an investor can sit in Calgary and can invest in technology start-ups in Austin. They can go to Australia. They can start up manufacturing companies in Germany. Capital is moving very quickly globally, and it means Alberta cannot afford to think about security regulations solely as a compliance exercise.

This government needs to start thinking more strategically. This government needs to start asking the questions: how do we become the best place in North America to invest? How do we become the easiest place to raise capital? How do we become the jurisdiction entrepreneurs are going to choose first? Much of today's focus appears to be on administrative structures, as we see in this piece of legislation, rather than the economic outcomes. The government has redesigned the dashboard of a car without actually looking at whether or not the engine is still running in it. The goal isn't always necessarily better process, but the goal should be prosperity.

One of the greatest opportunities in Alberta is sitting right in front of us, and it's small and medium-sized businesses. It's our SMEs. These companies represent the overwhelming majority of

employers in our province. They're responsible for our innovation, they're responsible for our job creation, they're responsible for local economic growth, yet these businesses regularly face barriers when they try to raise capital. Just think about our young entrepreneur in Edmonton who's developed this amazing software platform. Let's say that it helps farmers. It's reducing fertilizer use, and it's helping to increase yield. The market opportunity absolutely exists. There are customers that are interested. The technology works, but the company needs investment to hire staff, scale operations, and enter into the market. Every dollar spent navigating complexity is a dollar not spent growing the business. Every month spent dealing with barriers is a month competitors gain on that advantage. Every regulatory obstacle increases the likelihood that the entrepreneur will look elsewhere. And when companies go elsewhere for funding, they often move their jobs, they move their talent, and the decision-making also moves.

The truly growth-oriented securities framework that we should be discussing in this House should focus on one thing, making it easier for small and growing businesses to access capital while protecting their investors. It shouldn't be one or the other. It definitely needs to be both.

Here's another example. Let's talk about technology because this government really likes to talk about technology. Alberta has quietly built – and I'll give credit to this – one of the strongest innovation ecosystems in Canada. Our universities are producing world-class talent. Our research is respected across global nations. Our entrepreneurs are building promising companies in AI, software development, digital health, cybersecurity, data science, and advancing computers. Alberta could be uniquely positioned to lead the next generation of economic growth, but once again we have that major obstacle, and it is growth capital.

Founders across the province tell the same story. Starting the company is difficult, growing the company is even harder, and finding the investment necessary to scale can be one of the biggest challenges of all. Too often our best companies eventually seek significant funding outside of our province. When that happens, the centre of the gravity starts to move out of our province and moves to places like B.C. and Saskatchewan. Investors are elsewhere. Board members are found elsewhere. Decision-makers are elsewhere, and eventually the jobs and the opportunities follow. Let's just think. If Alberta became known as the easiest jurisdiction in Canada for technology companies to raise capital, just imagine what our economy would look like. Not only would we retain talent, but we would attract it. Now when we talk about Alberta's future, we often hear people frame it as a choice between traditional engineering, energy, and emerging industries. And it's a false choice. We should have all of those opportunities.

Energy remains one of Alberta's greatest strengths, but the next generation of energy development requires enormous amounts of private capital. We could be investing in hydrogen, carbon capture, geothermal, petrochemicals, critical minerals, energy storage, small modular nuclear technologies. Any one of these opportunities has the potential to create jobs, attract investment, and strengthen Alberta's economy. But, again, none of that will happen without the capital. Investors consider billion-dollar projects with one simple question. Can we deploy capital effectively and confidently? If the answer is yes, the project's going to go forward. If the answer is no, investment will move elsewhere.

That's again why, when we open up securities acts, security policy matters. Good policy will accelerate growth. In Bill 41, when we opened up the Securities Act, this government missed a massive opportunity. It was poor policy. It's delaying policy, and it's going to impact our opportunity to raise that capital.

Agriculture presents another enormous opportunity. Alberta already produces some of the highest quality agricultural products in the world, but our future prosperity can't come solely from exporting the raw commodity; it comes from adding value: food processing, agriculture technology, fertilizer production, bioproducts, precision agriculture, exports. I have a list. Each of these represent a significant investment opportunity. Imagine more processing facilities being built here in Alberta instead of Saskatchewan. Imagine more agriculture technology being developed in Alberta and not in Saskatchewan or Manitoba. Imagine more investment looking at agriculture not as a traditional sector but as an innovative leader. Again, they all require that capital, and capital requires an attractive investment environment.

Nowhere is the opportunity greater than in venture capital. Alberta has no shortage of entrepreneurs. We often lack access to develop deep pools of investment capital. The world's most successful innovative economies understand that – we've seen it in Silicon, Austin, Boston – and those ecosystems thrive because innovative ideas have been able to find the funding.

All you have to do is look in downtown Calgary. There's so much opportunity here. I would have wished to have seen the Finance minister stand up here today and say: we've opened up the Securities Act, and we've addressed our ability to attract that capital investment. Instead, we heard nothing. I've been asking this government for years to start looking at the Securities Act, not as just a tool that the government has but an actual strategic objective. And, once again, this government has failed.

The Deputy Chair: Are there others? The Member for Lethbridge-West.

Member Miyashiro: Thank you, Mr. Chair. You know, there are so many moving pieces to Bill 41, and I have so little time to address everything that needs to be discussed. So let's start with auto insurance, shall we? Since we're doing this culture thing, this reminds me of an old Beatles song. And it starts this way: "Tell me why you cried. And why you lied to me. Tell me why you cried, And why you lied to me. Well, I gave you ev'rything I had, But you left me sitting on my own." Well, the first part is "Tell me why you cried."

The Alberta NDP brought in a rate cap for auto insurance. The UCP cried and didn't like it and removed it only because it was implemented by the NDP. It didn't matter that it helped keep rates stable and affordable because, you know, why not allow auto insurance rates to get out of control for years and years just to own the NDP? The second part is: "And why you lied to me." Well, the UCP said their auto insurance reforms would lower the cost of auto insurance immediately. But three years later we're still not seeing the big savings that were promised. It's still coming, they say. And, Mr. Chair, the third part: "Well, I gave you ev'rything I had, But you left me sitting on my own." Well, now they're still trying to clean up the mess that they created. The UCP has allowed auto insurance rates to increase much faster than inflation. Under this government's plan, Alberta will still have among the highest auto insurance rates in Canada. Albertans will also be limited in their ability to sue if they're seriously hurt in a crash.

9:50

You know, what this has done, partially, is set up a multidimensional chain reaction affecting affordability for people, especially young people. As was mentioned earlier by my colleague from Edmonton-McClung, auto insurance costs for new and younger drivers almost make it prohibitive for car insurance and car ownership.

When my son, like, three years ago, I think, tried to get auto insurance, it would cost him more than the car payment of this old beater he wanted to buy, which meant he had to work longer and more hours in order to pay for that. Unless these young people have a well-paying job, live with their parents, or their parents help them with costs, or all of the above, they're not going to be able to afford a car.

If they want to work but they can't afford auto insurance, they'd have to use public transit, ride a bike, a scooter, or find some other way to work. But, you know, Mr. Chair, public transit isn't an option in many communities, and bikes and scooters aren't the answer in our harsh winters, so a lot of the time they can't get to work, well, unless, of course, their parents drive them. The cycle starts over. Can't afford it; can't buy the car; can't get to work, and the affordability cycle just keeps rolling along.

Where does this end? Well, you know what? We could have partially fended this off, one, if we would have had a cap on insurance; two, when fuel skyrocketed earlier this year because of international conflicts, not because, as the UCP says, they have such magical financial acumen; they could have removed the gas tax. It would have been simple.

The amount they were making in royalties would have more than enough made up for getting rid of the gas tax. In fact, they've made enough in royalties in the first few weeks to get rid of the gas tax for the last three or four months. But they didn't do it. What was their solution? Let's give everybody a gas tax rebate. Sounds good. I mean, some of you guys are too young, but some people remember the gas Ralph bucks that we received in I think it was the '80s, '90s.

But this hundred-dollar gas tax was supposed to off-set the high cost of fuel. As we know, with how much fuel costs, up until just a few weeks ago, that hundred dollars wouldn't have put a dent in it for anybody. The irony of the gas tax rebate is that it attracted the scrutiny of the CRA, big daddy tax people. They're looking at that as: hey; we think this is taxable income. It took some dancing around by the UCP to actually look at doing this a different way and then trying to implement it again.

You know, it goes back to this government just doing things without thinking about it. It sounds good. I mean, it's like talking to someone, and they talk up a big story and it sounds really good until you ask the next question and all of a sudden it's like: hmm, maybe that's not such a good idea anyway. Maybe it's not so great.

When we looked at the insurance that the UCP wanted to do, at first the trial lawyers were really not happy about it. They were the ones that were saying: wait a second; are you saying that we're not going to get as much business because you're going to stop us from litigating on accidents and settlements? It seemed like that whole set-up was actually to put trial lawyers at a disadvantage and to protect brokers. That's what it seemed like.

Now when they're trying to change things, it looks like they're trying to make friends with the lawyers again, and now they're starting to put the brokers at a disadvantage, and they're not happy. So I'm wondering, Mr. Chair, if there's a way that this government can actually implement some of these changes and maybe talk to people before doing it. You know, it really always comes back to consultation for this government. This government talks a big game about consulting with Albertans, but obviously they didn't do that when they tried to implement a bunch of this, right?

I think what we need to do with this bill is to not pass it as a whole, and to break it up and look at it in pieces, and have this government actually think through all these things in an omnibus bill, that they always do, and come up with the answers before they create the legislation. We've seen it time and time again, how this government has brought legislation forward. They've had to amend it two or three times in order for it to properly work.

Let's start with this Bill 41. Take a hard look at all the things that it needs to do, that they're trying to do, that make sense, and get it to work right before they bring it to the House for a vote so they don't have to come back to us for amendments in a few weeks and say: oh, sorry; this isn't going to work.

Mr. Chair, at that point, I will not support this.

The Deputy Chair: Are there others that wish to speak?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The clauses of Bill 41 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Any opposed? That is carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Williams: Yes, Mr. Chair. I move that the committee rise and report on bills 35, 40, and 41.

[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 bills: Bill 40, Bill 41. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 35. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, does the Assembly agree or concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading
Bill 43
Transportation (Safe and Sensible Roads) Statutes Amendment Act, 2026

The Acting Speaker: Before we continue with the business at hand, we did have a point of order earlier on today at 3:57, I believe, made by the Deputy Government House Leader. That point of order has been withdrawn, so that is dealt with and over.

The Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move second reading of Bill 43, Transportation (Safe and Sensible Roads) Statutes Amendment Act, 2026.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to make a comment? I will call on the Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's always charming when the minister gets up and says nothing about his bill and shows how proud he is of what his work has resulted in. I've got lots to say about it, though, Mr. Speaker. Bill 43 is a lot bigger than bike lanes, and it covers a lot of ground, so we'll cover as much as we can.

10:00

I often think: what happens when you arrive first in a government caucus meeting? I think the first thing that somebody says is: let's see what we can run up the flagpole today. See what comes to mind, Mr. Speaker. We'll try, in this case, to wave the flag for public safety at all levels of government as it comes to transportation matters as they legislate in their respective jurisdictions.

But, Mr. Speaker, all Albertans are pretty alarmed at how the UCP provincial government has never seen another level of government which they did not want to control or limit their influence or downright eliminate if they thought that they could get away with it. My view is that the provincial government would love to see the federal government as eunuchs and the municipal governments as puppets. Puppets and eunuchs on either side of the coin is what the minister hopes to see when he faces other levels of government. That's the way they seem to act when they interact with other levels of government.

Now, Bill 43 is a glaring example of this principle of privilege, this privileged view of their role in government. It's all about controlling power unto themselves and denying any challenge or threat to their authority, as if they govern by divine right. Heaven forbid if anyone but them got to form government to make their rules the rules that actually make life better for Albertans, and I've heard members opposite actually say something to that effect. Heaven forbid if anybody else but them could govern.

Well, Bill 43 falls along that vein, Mr. Speaker. It's all about power, veto power, to be precise. The UCP love everything American style: American-style privatized health care, American-style tuition-funded postsecondary education, and certainly a MAGA-inspired gerrymandering approach to creating electoral boundary maps which favour themselves. So it is with Bill 43: American-style authoritarian control of municipal jurisdiction.

Albertans love to interact with their municipal governments. It's the level of government closest to them. Witness the budget consultation process that's going on right now in Edmonton with 250 people lined up to register their presentations to city council. Extra time has been scheduled, so all presenters can be heard. That is real consultation, Mr. Speaker, at a municipal grassroots level.

On the subject of Bill 43 what Alberta sees is dictation, not consultation. "Nothing to see here" is commonly heard from members opposite on the government side. "No reason for alarm," I heard the Minister of Justice say numerous times this week. The fictional reality is often different from reality, Mr. Speaker.

Now, what I want to get into today is more of a deeper dive into Bill 43. I mentioned in my earlier opening remarks that it is much more than bike lanes. There's a lot of content, a lot of roadway to cover in this piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to, with the indulgence of the House, rely upon a very good analysis that I found on a – it's called Factsmtr Substack, and I will table this later on, probably tomorrow, in the Legislature because it does a pretty good deep dive and analysis of Bill 43 and what it really changes. It is titled Beyond Bike Lanes: What Alberta UCP's Bill 43 Really Changes. It goes on to say:

> Bill 43 would give the province more control over Alberta's cities, leave them to pay for decisions they don't make, and shield the provincial government from legal challenges.

Now,

> Alberta's UCP government has introduced a bill that would block lawsuits against the province, its ministers and officials, including claims of bad faith, while giving cabinet the power to rewrite signed municipal transit agreements and back-date the changes.

Backdate the changes, retroactively allow them to rewrite signed municipal transit agreements.

[The Speaker in the chair]

> The legislation [of course] is Bill 43, the Transportation (Safe and Sensible Roads) Statutes Amendment Act, 2026, introduced on November 19.
>
> Public debate has focused on bike lanes.

But there's much more to it.

> The bill raise far more consequential questions about who controls public money, who pays when the province changes its decisions, and whether municipalities and citizens can hold the government accountable when those decisions cause financial harm.
>
> An examination of other UCP legislation,

the Substack goes on, Mr. Speaker,

> reveals a broader pattern of increasing provincial control over municipalities, public money, and independent institutions.

Now, as of November 22 Bill 43 had received first reading. It's not law yet. It's still being debated in the House, as we well know. Announcements have been made, but no final amendments have been recorded. Of course, there was a big kerfuffle, Mr. Speaker, when the mayor of Calgary determined that he was given information by the Premier which contradicted information in the bill that suggested that decisions that were changed or imposed upon the city with respect to bike lanes, to either get rid of them, were incorrectly forcing the city to shoulder the burden of those costs. It's still kind of up in the air as to where that decision lies, and was a big bit of a total foofaraw. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I can hear several voices, and the only one I should hear is the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that support from you. The government would like to be protected from lawsuits as well. Bill 43 would actually do that. It protects the proposed section 22 of the renamed Urban Rail Transit Act, titled "Extinguishment of causes of action," will prohibit legal proceedings arising from the act's enactment or operation, actions taken under it, changes or termination of rights, and related representations.

Now, interestingly enough, Mr. Speaker, the name of the act has been changed to the Urban Rail Transit Act by section 2(2), and that is something which got rid of language that the government didn't like. They didn't like the words "public transit." Heaven forbid anything could be titled with the words "public transit" in it, and they didn't like the word "green." So, my goodness, the name got changed to simply Urban Rail Transit Act. Well, that just goes to show you that the government is panicking about anything that smells of public investment and that may actually have a green tinge to it.

The protection covers the province, cabinet ministers, government employees, agents, and advisers, and the proposed lawsuit protections apply to the Alberta government and its officials, not municipalities. The proposed lawsuit protections apply to the Alberta government and its officials, not municipalities. Does this seem fair? You decide. Cities would remain responsible for complying with provincial directions without receiving the same express legal protection. So the province could go in, make change orders, and make demands upon this municipality, and it's the municipality who has to suffer the cost. This is blatantly unfair and, I think, more than an overreach. It's an attack upon municipal government, Mr. Speaker.

It expressly includes claims involving breach of contract, misuse of public office, bad faith, breach of trust, and breach of fiduciary

obligations. It covers claims for damages, compensation, and other legal remedies, including claims arising before the legislation takes effect. Bill 43 would automatically end lawsuits already filed against the government. It would already end lawsuits already filed against the Alberta government, its ministers, or officials over matters covered by the legislation. Does this seem mind blowing to you, Mr. Speaker? It sure does to me. This absolute, authoritarian control is something that one would expect to see in maybe Viktor Orbán's Hungary or perhaps Donald Trump's America. But Alberta? No. We're getting used to that type of authoritarian control here, but we need to stand up to it, and we will be doing that with respect to our opposition to Bill 43 here today. Now, the courts would dismiss those lawsuits even if they allege bad faith or misconduct, and neither side would be awarded legal costs.

10:10

Three other proposed sections of the renamed Urban Rail Transit Act strengthen those protections. Section 23 prevents compensation or other remedies for certain changes to contractual rights. Section 24 prevents covered actions from being treated as expropriation under Alberta's Expropriation Act, restricting compensation through that law. Let me repeat that. Section 24 prevents covered actions from being treated as expropriation under Alberta's Expropriation Act, restricting compensation through the law, taking away Albertans' rights to be compensated under the Expropriation Act. What is this government leaving to benefit Albertans? Section 25 gives the legislation and its regulations priority over conflicting laws and certain funding agreements. Once again, a matter of strangling the rights of Albertans.

Now, Bill 43 contains two different protections against lawsuits. Under the proposed changes to the Traffic Safety Act government officials are protected only when acting in good faith, but the proposed rail transit provisions would block lawsuits against the Alberta government and its officials even when they are accused of acting in bad faith or misusing their authority. Does this sound familiar, Mr. Speaker, this government protecting itself even when it acts in bad faith or misuses its authority? The legislation does not eliminate constitutional protections or every legal challenge. However, it does remove significant legal remedies for matters covered by the bill.

This government could rewrite signed transit agreements. A signed transit agreement under Bill 43 will allow the government to change funding agreements that municipalities have already signed with the province for rail transit projects. The government could change how much funding a city receives, which expenses qualify for funding, and the conditions the city must meet. It's basically veto power, Mr. Speaker. These changes could be made without the municipality's agreement and applied retroactively – retroactively applied – even after a city has committed money or signed construction contracts. How much of a total screw-up can you imagine that would be?

The changes could also affect contracts that municipalities have signed with construction companies and other third parties. The municipality would still be responsible for paying the costs of following provincial directions as well as operating and maintaining its transit infrastructure. Bill 43 would give the province greater control over transit decisions without requiring it to assume the resulting municipal costs. This is a draconian piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, which basically slays any authority that the municipalities have in many, many areas, particularly with respect to transportation, and it is unashamedly basically stripping the authority that any municipality has to enter into or negotiate or change funding agreements for major transportation projects.

It begs the question, Mr. Speaker: why bother with municipal government? Like, why bother? You know, the government likes to remind us that the municipalities are the child of the province, that they're not an official order of government in Canada constitutionally like the federal government and the provincial government are under the Constitution Act. It makes one wonder if this is actually the direction that the government is going. It sure seems like they're looking to slowly, slowly, maybe less than slowly, maybe rapidly, squeeze the authority and the life out of the decision-making power and the funding power, the financial power, of the municipalities in this province.

It begs the question: who's next? I mean, there have been some rumours flying around the province about public school trustees and Catholic school trustees. Who's going to be looking after their interests if indeed this is the way municipalities can be treated with respect to infrastructure, where they can be totally disregarded, where they can have their agreements ripped up, and where they can be responsible for any change orders that the government decides they want to have entered into and the municipality has to shoulder the burden of those changes without regard to the budget implications? Mr. Speaker, I'm sure you're well aware, having your background in the municipal government, that that is a very difficult burden to bear from a municipal standpoint.

I'm hoping, Mr. Speaker, that the government will see fit to alter course here. This is a dangerous road to go down, and it began under the Kenney government. The UCP introduced similar transit protections in 2019 through the Public Transit and Green Infrastructure Project Act, language which this government doesn't like. That law already allowed changes to certain funding agreements and restricted lawsuits and compensation claims, but Bill 43 does not introduce these legal protections for the first time. It proposes to rename the existing law the "Urban Rail Transit Act," expand its application to the additional transit agreements, and add broader provincial control over municipal rail transit planning and decisions. The same approach that appears in other UCP legislation has already become law in Alberta.

I'm not sure how much more I wish to contribute today, Mr. Speaker. I could go on for a while yet, but there may be other speakers who wish to add their voices to this very important piece of legislation, many people in this House on our side with extremely large municipal government experience, and I'd really like to hear from them what they say about this absolutely draconian piece of legislation.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs. I thought maybe some of the people that were talking when it wasn't their turn would be on their feet right now, but I'm happy to recognize you, Minister.

Mr. Williams: I am only on my feet when it's my turn, Mr. Speaker, and we have begun the great debate on Bill 43 with an inspired speech from the minister of transportation and the Member for Edmonton-McClung who used his 15 minutes in reply to the pithy speech from the minister. However, I think we will move to adjourn debate on this bill for now and return to it in the future when the government calls.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders
Third Reading

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

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

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know my colleague, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, said that the minister of transportation's speech on his bill was – was it exciting?

Some Hon. Members: Pithy.

Mr. Nicolaides: He did say pithy, but there was another word. I think inspirational.

An Hon. Member: Inspiring.

Mr. Nicolaides: Inspiring. Thank you. And I just want to remind members that, you know, "inspiring" is very subjective, and, of course, while one person may find it inspiring . . .

The Speaker: Hon. minister, let's try to address the bill that is before us now. How would that be?

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed. I was just merely referencing that to provide some context for my comments this evening. Hopefully if members did find the minister of transportation's speech to be inspiring, perhaps they may even go so far as to find mine inspiring. I mean, that's rare, but, you know, stranger things have happened. So we'll see what happens.

Now, if I haven't done so, I believe I should formally move third reading of Bill 35, the Education and Childcare (Securing Parental Involvement) Statutes Amendment Act, 2026. I'll do that just to make sure that I have all my bases covered. You're very welcome, Mr. Speaker.

Now with that being said, there are a few things that I want to address this evening. One of the pieces of criticism that I've heard over Bill 35 is that it doesn't perhaps help to hire additional teachers that our education system desperately needs. It doesn't help to provide more support staff into our schools, which students with specialized learning needs may need. It's not to say that those priorities are not important. They are indeed, and it's also why the government is taking significant action in those areas.

I was very proud to be able to announce several months ago in the summer the development of the new class size reduction grant, a first of its kind that provides an investment of $200 million to our K to 9 classrooms across the province to reduce class sizes in those critically important foundational years. That's precisely some of the rationale as to why we focused on K to 9 in developing the class size reduction grant because some people have asked: "Well, why K to 9? I mean, there are large class sizes in high school as well."

The important thing, however, is to remember that in those years, of course – not to say that all years are not important. All years of a student's educational journey are critically important. But I think we can all agree that those early foundational years are perhaps a little bit more important as students work to develop the foundations for learning, the foundations for life, and the foundations for success. The more that we can do to provide additional assistance to those critical years through hiring more teachers and making additional support available, I think that's critically important. I'm incredibly proud of the work that we've done to create that new grant, invest $200 million, and help to reduce class sizes.

10:20

In addition, we also began last year, what I've often referred to as, the largest data collection exercise in Alberta education history. I say this because while, yes, there has been reporting in the past of class size, it was just that, Mr. Speaker. It was just reporting around class size. But we went further, and we looked at information regarding composition. We wanted to know how many different types of students existed out there. And when I say "types," I mean students that were mainly identified as refugee students or who speak English as an additional language or have other types of learning challenges or require additional learning support. Then we also evaluated and asked school divisions to also report the occurrence rate of those different complexity factors that I mentioned. That's why you may often hear me referring to "the largest data collection exercise in Alberta education history." Yes, we did collect class size data but also the complexity and occurrence rate. That information was collected from over 108,000 classrooms. That gave us the clearest picture into Alberta classrooms.

In addition to that, we also were able to use that information and make clear, evidence-based decisions about how best to direct limited government resources to support our education system. One of the first things that we did was provide funding to establish 476 complexity teams. Now, a quick reminder for the Assembly, a complexity team is comprised of one teacher and two educational assistants. We used the data that we had collected in November to explore those schools and those school divisions that had the highest rates of complexity and class sizes and directed the complexity teams to serve those very specific classrooms. So we were able to direct resources in a very objective, measured, and evidence-based way to help address some of the growing complexity that we've seen.

In addition to that original investment that we used to create 476 complexity teams, we were also able to make a second announcement of additional complexity teams, to bring the total number of complexity teams that we would finance in the province to 800. I was proud to report to Albertans at the beginning of this school year that as of the start of this '26-27 school year 81 per cent of those complexity teams were in place. That's critically important, Mr. Speaker. That is hundreds and thousands of teachers and educational assistants, not in theory, not on paper but in a classroom where they weren't before, in a school where they weren't before, helping kids that weren't getting help prior. That is an important investment. That is an important change that we've been able to facilitate.

In addition, we've also continued to move forward aggressively with the schools now program. Of course, we launched the schools now program in the fall of 2024 in part to respond to the significant wave of new students that were making their way to Alberta schools. You may have heard me reference in the past that over the past four years Alberta schools have welcomed over 90,000 new students in just four short years. That additional pressure requires us to move forward aggressively in building new schools, modernizing spaces, and adding capacity wherever we can. The schools now program: we have backed that with an $8.6 billion commitment to create 200,000 spaces. That program is moving ahead in a tremendous way. We are currently on track to have 19 school projects completed by September of 2027, creating another 15,000 student spaces.

In addition, we're also looking at all avenues to expand spaces as quickly as we can. I recently announced a pilot program for

independent school capital. We have invested $25 million to support a variety of independent schools across the province to assist them in expanding space. We estimate we'll be able to create just over 3,000 spaces with that investment of $25 million.

I hope that the independent school capital program is something that the NDP will support. I say that because it has in part been government policy when the NDP was in office. They may have forgotten, but when the NDP was in office, the Edmonton public school board had requested of the education minister of that time to reduce funding to charter schools and to independent schools and the minister of education, the NDP minister of education, said no, refused, and said that it was necessary to continue to support them because they were experiencing a growth in enrolment and they needed every possible space that they could to help accommodate students. We're saying the exact same thing. I'm confident that by using the same logic that the NDP used when they were in office that they'll support us in the independent school capital program and in our expansion of programs for choice. Now, I hope that to be true, Mr. Speaker, but to be honest, I'm not really holding my breath.

Now, coming back to the schools now program, again, you may have heard me reference in the Assembly in the past that I'm exceptionally proud of the fact that as a government we have funded over 205 projects versus the NDP who when they were in office funded only 48 . . .

Ms Hoffman: Two hundred and forty-four.

Mr. Nicolaides: Every time I say that number, the NDP heckles back and provides a different number, provides a larger number because they want to provide a number of schools actually built or completed. Now, this is the important thing, Mr. Speaker. The NDP claims that they built and established over a hundred schools, 200-something schools. Now, if the NDP only provided funding . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: I remember asking folks to let the member on that side speak, and now I'm going to ask for the same courtesy here.

Mr. Nicolaides: Now, Mr. Speaker, if the NDP only funded 48 projects, how were they able to build 200 or whatever the number is that they claim? Interesting. The reason for that is because the projects that they finalized and put the plaques on were projects that were previously approved and previously put in the capital plan by the previous Progressive Conservative government. It makes only logical sense. Having only funded 48 school projects, how could they have completed over 200 projects? I want to just draw attention to that. I am proud of the fact that our government has funded over 205 projects versus the 48 projects that the NDP have funded.

Now, in addition to those investments, we are continuing to move forward to address class size issues, to address complexity-related issues, to address violence in our schools, a growing concern. I recently had the fortune of meeting with my teacher advisory council and we spent almost the bulk of our hour and a half talking specifically about violence and aggression in the classroom. There's more work that needs to be done but we've undertaken some significant steps that include developing a new student support policy framework that lays the foundation and provides guidance to our school divisions as to how specialized needs should be provided to students.

What we've done in that student support policy framework is indicate that a school division no longer needs to wait until a student has received any kind of formal diagnosis from a formalized assessment but rather work to provide individual support can begin. Based on the observations of teachers and the understanding of teachers and working in collaboration with parents that support can be provided. It's a very important change, and that student support policy framework will lay the foundation for us to revise the standards for special education, which are 20 years out of date. Our school divisions are currently operating with standards regarding special education that were developed in 2004. Those require updating, and we will undertake that important work, Mr. Speaker.

10:30

Just because we have the opportunity to bring forward legislation, which we have limited windows and opportunities to do because the Legislature sits during certain times and is our window to bring forward legislation, doesn't mean that all the other important work regarding hiring teachers, hiring complexity teams, building schools, and doing all of the important work that Alberta students and families expect can't be done and is not happening. It is indeed happening.

Again, at the beginning of the school year I was proud to be able to report to parents that as we start the '26-27 school year, we are doing so with 10 new schools opening doors, 2,100 net new teachers, and over 1,000 net new EAs. On the point of teachers and EAs I just want to highlight for the Assembly, because my team was able to do the analysis, that when the NDP was in office during those four years, Mr. Speaker, they were able to facilitate a net gain of over 3,000 teachers, which is an increase of 9 per cent. Our government has been able to achieve a net gain of almost 5,000, or 11 per cent, in terms of total teachers, and our government has also been able to see a total net gain of approximately 800 EAs, or 16 per cent. So again, I'm proud to look at our record in comparison with the NDP.

As it relates to Bill 35, our government firmly believes in ensuring that parents are in the driver's seat as much as possible when it comes to their child's education and as it relates to child care. We've had the fortune just earlier this evening of bringing forward an amendment to ensure that parents are notified, police are notified if a critical incident occurs at a licensed child care facility because we believe that parents need to have that transparency and know what's happening in a child care setting.

Furthermore, in schools we want parents to be able to have the highest possible degree of information that they can. That's why we've instituted provisions in the bill to give the minister the ability to set standards as they relate to report cards. I hear consistently from parents that they have questions and concerns as to how to interpret their child's report card. Whether a school division is using a format that grades a student from AC, AB or EX or 1 to 4, many parents have expressed to me that they have concerns in trying to really understand how exactly their child is doing. As a result of no minimum provincial standards around reporting, we have various reporting structures across the province and different approaches across the province, so this bill will help to provide some minimum baseline consistency standards that I believe Albertans expect.

In addition, as it relates to noninstructional days, this is an area that I hear about quite consistently from parents. They ask me quite often about noninstructional days or PD days. They ask me about the frequency of PD days. They ask me why there are so many PD days. Of course, I inform them that that is something that is negotiated between the employer, that is the school authority, and the union directly, but within that conversation it did lead me to wonder and believe if there's more that we can do to keep parents involved or provide them with additional information. [interjections]

The Speaker: I'll just ask folks to let the minister who has the floor speak. While I appreciate that the hand signals going both ways are

friendly – I appreciate the fact that everybody is using all five fingers when they're using hand signals. That's a positive thing, but please be careful with that.

Minister, please carry on.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, it may be my hope that the speech would be inspiring as it's truly resonating with members opposite. Again, I doubt so.

The last point I'll make, Mr. Speaker, just to finish my comment on the noninstructional days, is that parents want to know more. They want to know how noninstructional days are being used to support their child's education. They want to have greater transparency, and we're happy to do that to make sure that parents have the fullest picture possible to support their child's education and to support their child in an early learning setting.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will acknowledge the hand signals and conclude by, once again, just for the record, moving third reading of Bill 35, the Education and Childcare (Securing Parental Involvement) Statutes Amendment Act, 2026.

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

Member Hoyle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 35, which makes changes to both Alberta's child care and education systems. There are some measures in this bill that move us in the right direction, but there are also some very significant gaps. What concerns me most is that once again we have a government that seems more interested in introducing new rules and exercising greater control than addressing the real challenges facing Alberta families, children, parents, and educators. When we talk about child care, parents want to know that their children are safe, that if something serious happens while their child is in care, they will be informed quickly, honestly, and directly. Parents also want to know that their children are receiving the attention, support, and resources they need to succeed. Teachers want manageable class sizes, adequate classroom supports, and the resources to do their jobs well and effectively.

Bill 35 falls short of addressing many of these concerns. Parents place an enormous amount of trust in child care providers. For many Albertans child care is not simply a convenience; it's what makes it possible to participate in the workforce. When parents make that decision, they should be able to trust that their children are safe and that they will be informed if something goes wrong. That is why the concerns surrounding the Willowbrae Academy in Edmonton were so troubling.

In June of 2025 Alberta's early learning and child care office received a complaint involving the alleged sexual assault of a child by a staff member at that facility. The accused staff member was placed on administrative leave. The initial response to the complaint was taken seriously, but there were significant concerns on how and when other families were informed. Parents of other children attending the facility were not immediately notified. We're talking about allegations of very serious criminal conduct. We should never lose sight of the children and families at the centre of this situation. But there's a more important legislative question that this case exposed. How can parents make informed decisions about the safety of their children if they're not given timely information about serious incidents happening in the facility that their children attend? What makes the situation particularly concerning is that the child care provider had technically complied with the legislation as it is currently written. For 80 days families were left without the information they believed they needed to make decisions about their children's safety.

This was not simply an issue with one child care provider. It exposed a gap in the legislation itself. The Early Learning and Child Care Act requires providers to report alleged abuse to the licensing body, triggering a review, but it didn't establish a clear requirement for automatic notification to all parents and families when an abuse investigation was under way, a gap that should have been addressed more decisively by this government.

In March of 2026 the Alberta NDP put forward three clear calls to action: first, a government-led notification system for serious incidents involving physical or sexual abuse; second, a public online portal where parents could access the history of a child care program, including its records of incident and compliance; and third, a mandated regular review of the Early Learning and Child Care Act to ensure the gaps in the legislation are identified and addressed. These were practical recommendations. They were intended to give parents greater confidence, improve transparency, and ensure that families were not left in the dark when something serious happens.

Unfortunately, the government did not adequately address these recommendations. While Bill 35 makes some changes to the notification system, it still did not go far enough. Under this legislation child care operators will have a duty to report incidents within a reasonable timeline and critical incidents immediately after becoming aware of them. The bill also gives the statutory director authority to require safety plans or other measures considered necessary to protect the health, safety, and well-being of children. These are important responsibilities. It also establishes clearer definitions of incidents and critical incidents, including situations where a child goes missing; allegations of physical, sexual, emotional abuse, or neglect; injuries requiring emergency medical care; or police involvement relating to the child or the operation of a child care program.

10:40

Where this legislation falls short is that child care operators are only required to notify the parents or guardians of children who are directly affected by an incident or critical incident, not every family whose child attends that facility. Why should a parent whose child attends the same facility not be informed when there have been allegations of abuse involving a staff member? That's not to suggest that confidential personal information should be shared, only that there should be clear, consistent processes that ensure all parents are informed when a critical incident occurs at their child care facility. A notification could identify the nature and seriousness of an incident without identifying the child involved or compromising an investigation. Parents deserve that basic level of transparency.

The government has included provisions allowing notices to be posted on the government of Alberta website, in a prominent location at the facility, or in another manner determined by the statutory director, but posting a notice is not the same as directly notifying parents. They may pick up their child, go home, and remain completely unaware that something serious and critical has happened. In 2026, when child care providers routinely communicate with parents through e-mails, applications, and digital platforms, there is no reason why we cannot establish a clear requirement for written direct notification.

And there's another significant gap in this legislation. The bill does not extend these requirements to unlicensed private day homes. Children do not become less deserving of protection because their parents choose a different child care arrangement, and those families should not have fewer protections. Instead, the government should be doing everything in its power to ensure that every child is protected regardless of where they receive care.

When parents lose confidence in the safety of a child care facility, they may have no choice but to withdraw their children, and that could mean missing work, reducing their hours, leaving employment, or even turning down employment opportunities. For a single parent, a family already struggling with the cost of living, or a small-business owner who cannot easily step away from their businesses, the consequences of a lack of child care can be enormous. Reliable child care is part of the infrastructure that supports our economy and jobs, and confidence in the safety of that child care is fundamental to making it work.

When I think about all the discussions we've had tonight on Bill 35, I've realized it has taken this government over one year – one year later this evening the minister of education took the recommendations from my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar to amend this part of Bill 35 to include the recommendations that the Alberta NDP put forward over one year ago. I wish this could have been done sooner for the sake of parents' and children's safety, but I'm happy at least that the government made the decision to do that today.

Looking at Bill 35 and the changes to Alberta's education system, if there's one thing parents and teachers and school communities have been telling us and this government consistently, it's that our education system is under enormous pressure. Classrooms are overcrowded, teachers are dealing with increasingly complex student needs, schools are struggling to provide adequate support, and enrolment continues to grow faster than this government is building the infrastructure, those schools that the minister talked about, to accommodate this fast growth. These are the issues that should be consuming this minister of education's attention. Instead, we have a bill that spends considerable time telling school boards how to manage report cards, how to report on professional development days, how to handle complaints, how to obtain ministerial approval before beginning the process of naming and renaming a school.

Look, teachers have been clear – very clear – about what they need. They need smaller class sizes, more educational assistants, better supports for students with complex needs, and adequate funding to ensure that every child has an opportunity to learn. They need a government that listens to them and expedites quickly. Our children matter and their education matters, but instead this government is introducing new rules about report cards. What exactly is this government trying to accomplish with these kinds of changes?

While Bill 35 proposes province-wide standards for report cards across public, separate, and francophone school authorities, the government has not provided a particularly compelling explanation for why this change is necessary or what problem it's intending to solve. Who was asking for this? Did parents identify standardized report cards as one of the most significant challenges facing their children? Did teachers tell the government that the format of the report cards was preventing them from delivering quality education? Did school boards ask the minister to take greater control over how they communicate student progress?

I would argue that the concerns we hear most often are very different. Parents are concerned that their children are in classrooms with too many students, and teachers are concerned that they are being asked to do more with fewer resources. There is nothing inherently wrong with having consistent standards for communicating student achievement, but we should be asking what problem we are trying to solve before introducing new province-wide systems. Let's not pretend that changing the format of a report card is the same thing as improving education because it isn't.

I'm particularly concerned about the timing of these changes. Last year Alberta's teachers recently went through a historic labour dispute. Teachers took the difficult step of going on strike because they were raising serious concerns about classroom conditions, workload, class sizes, and the resources available to support students.

Their constitutional rights were subsequently stripped away and they were forced back to work. That should have been a wake up call for this government. It should have been an opportunity to reflect on why teachers had reached that point. Instead, Bill 35 feels like another example of a government that is not listening to the people working in our schools every day for our children. We are told that the government wants to improve accountability, but accountability must go both ways.

Education is one of the most important investments we can make in our economy. Today's students are tomorrow's nurses, engineers, tradespeople, teachers, entrepreneurs, business owners, and I believe we can do better than what is being proposed in Bill 35.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All right. It's my honour to rise to speak to Bill 35. I'm thankful that we all had a moment in the House today at least in reference to the amendment first brought to us by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to put our swords down a little bit and to focus if only for a moment on accountability for children and their safety. I'm thankful to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for putting . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. member, I just want to be able to hear you, so I'm going to ask folks that are having loud conversations to have them somewhere else.

Please go ahead.

Member Tejada: I know I listen with great interest to the members opposite. Thank you for that, Mr. Speaker.

I'm thankful to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for putting the safety of the children in his constituency first, for persisting in his advocacy, and doing the courageous thing in not looking away and not being dissuaded from speaking up. I was very moved by the member's call to all of us to do better.

It reminded me of a concept called institutional courage, and I'll just briefly share that definition with all of you today.

> It is an institution's commitment to seek the truth and engage in moral action, despite unpleasantness, risk, and short-term cost. [It's] a pledge to protect and care for those who depend on the institution.

In this case we were talking about child care centres. We could expand that to so many things.

> [It's] a compass oriented to the common good of individuals,

which is why the member's remarks reminded me of that concept,

> [the institution], and the world. It is a force that transforms institutions to be more accountable, equitable, [and healthy] places for everyone.

That is from the Center for Institutional Courage, if anyone cares to take a look. I would encourage members of this House to explore that concept when we're talking about anything to do with governance, but I think we can all agree that when we're talking about the well-being of children, that that is something very, very important for us to keep in mind. It applies to this bill but so many others.

10:50

In speaking to the child care-related portion of this bill, I'll say that while I'm glad that the amendment on critical incidents was

incorporated, I know and have faith that there's still so much more that can be done. We did call on this government to do a government-led notification system that would provide better protections for families, so I hope that that is what we see coming out of this bill either through the bill or through regulations later. While it made moderate changes to the notification system, we can always do better. All parents should be notified when critical incidents happen at their child care facility.

I found that I was especially moved by the member's comments as well as a mother. Somehow it doesn't seem that far away, the time that I spent taking my kids to and fro to child care. To hear the story both from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and the Member for Edmonton-Decore and to hear how much to heart they took the testimonies of their constituents: it's an important thing for all of us to do and to really take stock about the decisions that we make in this place and the impact that they can have not only to report on incidents but to also think about what the impact will be on any child if they are victimized. Right?

We're talking about children who have undergone great trauma, and notifying all of the parents in the cohort is critical because we're talking not only about the child who was victimized but also anyone in their cohort who may have witnessed something. We're talking about very small children who cannot speak for themselves, who cannot tell you why they're hurting, who can't tell you why they're stressed out, and I think that that's something that we really need to explore. Those are incidents that have long-lasting and often tragic consequences, and we should be doing everything in our power to protect those children.

I would go even further to that. If we're talking about an education bill, I think back to conversations around sex ed and the changes made to the Education Act where sex ed was opt-in instead of opt-out. I think our children lose a critical way to be able to put a language to protecting themselves from victimization. I would also say that any members here would agree that all children, regardless of the type of child care program that they're enrolled in, deserve to be safe.

My wish for this bill is that they also extend those provisions to unlicensed stay homes. It's a choice that was made in this legislation to leave it out. I will say that any of the unlicensed day homes that I encounter in the work that I do – people are living through an affordability crisis. You have folks that are entrepreneurial and who really care about that work, people who are caring for our most cherished loved ones. I would say that we owe them that, to give them that framework to be able to be educated on how to keep kids safe.

I myself had my kids at an unlicensed day home. She really set the standard in being incredibly communicative. She was very educated. There were some barriers that were a little bit harder for her to meet as a single mother, and she did her very best, but I know that she would have appreciated those guardrails as a child care provider. I'm curious as to why the government didn't take that step. I have hope that perhaps they will and can make a positive change to that legislation.

I do want to come back to some of the comments that were made by the minister around getting a clearer picture of what's needed and the complexity teams. I think it's always good to approach these things with an open mind and to get feedback from teachers, and while he's wanting to get a clearer picture of what's needed, what I'm hearing from parents and from teachers is that they also need a clearer picture of what actions will be taken to improve those conditions. It's not just about class size.

This government actually made a conscious choice to stop reporting on class sizes in 2020. If we're talking about the pressures in terms of population growth, this government also made a choice in 2021 to stop funding our public services to account for inflation and population growth. That was before the spike in immigration. So we can't kick the can down the road by keeping immigrant kids out, and I'll just make that comment.

Talking about earning your way in or out of a classroom or musing about making refugee and other kids who have no control over their immigration status pay for an education when it's actually a human right, it's covered under the UN declaration of the rights of the child – these are all kids that are in our communities. They are our children who are right now facing a barrier of paperwork. When that paperwork finally gets through, they go back into a grade with their peers and they've missed two years of education. That is a choice that this government makes, and they could definitely do better. If we care about kids, we can do better. We can draw the line at kids. Okay? I'd remind the minister that those children will eventually come back into the system and that keeping them out creates greater complexity down the line for them and their families.

I would hope that we are all invested in the success of kids in our communities, all of the kids in our communities. They are all our kids. I say this especially as a person of faith – I know that we have a lot of people of faith here – to just remember that value, the value that we hold in children and that they are precious. We're talking about the leaders of tomorrow. We need to invest in them, in their future, because it's our future, too.

We talk about workplace shortages, we talk about the gaps that we need to meet, and we have a ready and willing pool of people that we can invest in to make our communities better. I would recommend to the minister to look into that petition that was presented last week and the Education 4 All folks and to speak with the organizations that are supporting newcomer kids because that is potential that we lose if we don't invest in it. I think that's evidenced in so many people in this House on both sides of the aisle, that we all have something to contribute. So I will just say that on that point.

I do want to also respond to the minister's assertion that parents want to know more. I find it's a little too much for me to know as a parent. There's a lot there with two teenagers. But I would offer that the vast majority of the parents that I've spoken to want to also know more about what the plan is for their children in terms of graduation and to graduate with as many opportunities as possible rather than announcements about how to take fewer courses and selling it as a value-add.

I will say that I just recently had that conversation with my teenage daughter who was trying to convince me that there are all sorts of courses that she does not need to take because she has set her sights on a career path that she is sure is going to work out. I don't know about many of the people in this place, but I suspect that not all of us came through this career path as our first choice, so let's not limit the possibilities for our kids, shall we?

Teachers and parents have been clear about the challenges that Alberta classrooms are facing. Instead of addressing those challenges head-on, instead of having really concrete plans to address them, to ensure their success, to ensure a successful entry into trades which also require math, require science, require all of those things, we're talking about report cards, something I spend a limited time looking at or thinking about, unless there's an issue with a grade, which, thankfully, I don't have to encounter too much with my smarty-pants kids.

I will say that what I hear from parents, from teachers, from the students themselves: they're living through an affordability crisis as well. I just recently was speaking with a person who's in postsecondary who graduated early, who had problems at home and had to move out. So you know what? If we're going to talk about CALM classes and setting people up for success, you know,

creating that space for financial literacy – I think all of those things are great, but we also need to address the root causes.

11:00

We need to raise the minimum wage. We need to ensure that students have affordable housing for when they go into postsecondary. We need to make sure that we're training the workforce of tomorrow and giving them all of the opportunities that we can, and that is through investments in education and really having a long, hard look. Like, if we have been funding education and not accounting for inflation, not accounting for population growth, let's have a real, honest look in the mirror about why those systems are under strain, and let's provide real solutions.

I'll look at also some rules around professional development days. I would offer that there is also an opportunity here. I know parents that rely on schooling sometimes in one family rely on both, the private system for a specific reason and children who are in the public system, and I think they would appreciate knowing more about professional days and just applying that portion of the legislation to all of our school systems.

With that, what I will say is that there are several parts of this bill that I can support. We've seen some collaboration, like maybe a little bit of legislative Christmas magic. I don't know. Is Santa watching? I have hope, Mr. Speaker. But I would say that I support a lot about this bill. I would ask them to take in good faith the recommendations on how it could be made better.

Thank you so much.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any more speakers?

I see none. Would the mover like to close debate?

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I would like to take just a couple of brief moments to close debate to remind the Assembly of the important work that our government has undertaken to address class size pressure and complexity pressures in our schools.

I'm proud of the fact that we have provided $200 million in the class size reduction grant to help hire 1,400 K to 9 teachers to reduce class sizes in those critically important early developmental years. I'm proud to report that we have hired 566 complexity teams across the province in our most complex schools to ensure that students have the resources and the supports that they need in order to be able to succeed. I'm proud to be able to report to Albertans that we've hired 2,100 net new teachers, including 1,000 net new EAs.

At the start of this '26-27 school year we began with 10 new schools opening their doors. Nineteen are on track to open their doors for the upcoming school year. That's part of our government's aggressive $8.6 billion schools now program that seeks to build and modernize over 200,000 spaces across the province.

In addition to some of those targeted investments, Mr. Speaker, we've also moved forward with investments in a number of areas to help address student need, including increases to the early literacy and numeracy support grant that ensures that children in K to 3 that need literacy and numeracy interventions are able to receive them. It includes increases to program unit funding, or the PUF program. It includes grant rate increases to English as an additional language and to the refugee student grant to ensure that those students that have specialized needs are able to receive that additional attention.

This is all part of the government's historic investment that was made in Budget 2026. We were able to increase the ministry of education's operating budget by over 7 per cent, a rate that has not occurred at all at any time in this province's history. So while we have the opportunity this fall to debate legislation – that's why we come here – that does not distract or take away from the important work that is occurring every day to hire more teachers, build new schools, hire more EAs, and ensure that every student receives the foundations that they need and ensure that our education system has what it needs to deliver a world-class education. That work continues every day, Mr. Speaker.

With that, I'm happy to take my seat. Thank you so much.

[Motion carried; Bill 35 read a third time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Williams: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. After a long day of debating, I move that we adjourn the Assembly until 1:30 tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:05 p.m.]

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